



**This electronic thesis or dissertation has been
downloaded from Explore Bristol Research,
<http://research-information.bristol.ac.uk>**

Author:
Thacker, Jack

Title:
The Farming of Verse

the Georgic Mode in the Poetry of Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, and Alice Oswald

General rights

Access to the thesis is subject to the Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International Public License. A copy of this may be found at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>. This license sets out your rights and the restrictions that apply to your access to the thesis so it is important you read this before proceeding.

Take down policy

Some pages of this thesis may have been removed for copyright restrictions prior to having it been deposited in Explore Bristol Research. However, if you have discovered material within the thesis that you consider to be unlawful e.g. breaches of copyright (either yours or that of a third party) or any other law, including but not limited to those relating to patent, trademark, confidentiality, data protection, obscenity, defamation, libel, then please contact collections-metadata@bristol.ac.uk and include the following information in your message:

- Your contact details
- Bibliographic details for the item, including a URL
- An outline nature of the complaint

Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item in question will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

THE FARMING OF VERSE

*The Georgic Mode in the Poetry of Ted Hughes,
Seamus Heaney, and Alice Oswald*

JACK THACKER

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for
award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities,
Department of English.
July 2018.

77,966 words

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between poetry and agriculture in Britain and Ireland over the last fifty years, with a particular emphasis on the work of three major poets: Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, and Alice Oswald. The agricultural and horticultural work of these writers, it is argued, constitutes a revival of the georgic mode – a long-standing tradition of verse writing based on the classical example of Virgil's *Georgics*. Although the georgic is commonly acknowledged in accounts of pre-twentieth century English literature, it has largely remained absent from critical discussions of contemporary poetry.

Taking W. H. Auden's phrase that 'poetry makes nothing happen' to be written in the spirit of the georgic, this thesis attests to the survival of the mode as 'a way of happening' in modern times. Beginning with an analysis of the evolution of the georgic in both literary and critical examples, it proceeds to document how, for Hughes, Heaney, and Oswald, direct experience of manual, and especially agricultural, labour has proved to be a crucial factor in their responses to economic, political, and environmental crises.

In addition to examining these poets' treatment of agricultural subject matter, this thesis offers a sustained investigation into the formal aspects of their farming and gardening verses: from Hughes's poetic journal about raising livestock in Devon, to Heaney's evocations of growing up on a farm in Northern Ireland, to Oswald's gardening lyrics and longer poems about the lives of outdoor workers. It contends that the georgic's insistence on the harsh realities of labour – a factor which distinguishes it from other received labels such as pastoral or ecopoetry – can deepen our understanding of the complexities and contradictions inherent in literary representations of the countryside.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This thesis has been one of leisure and toil: toil because completing a thesis is inevitably a laborious task, but leisure thanks to those who have made the process of writing it not only enjoyable but possible. Work at something long enough and you are bound to go through some rough patches. I am grateful to both of my supervisors for steadying my hand and supporting me through difficult circumstances. Nick Groom has been an enthusiastic and sensitive co-supervisor, and I have learnt much from his feedback and advice. I am especially grateful to Ralph Pite, who acted as my guide throughout. This project has benefitted immeasurably from his insights as well as his patience, not to mention his friendship.

I must express my thanks for the support I have received from other members of staff at the University of Bristol, especially Stephen James and Laurence Publicover. Acknowledgements are also due to those who first cultivated my interests at the University of York: Trev Broughton and Richard Rowland, who set me on this path, Matthew Campbell, who gave me early encouragement; and most of all, Hugh Haughton, who planted the seeds of what would become my argument and nurtured them with wisdom and kind-heartedness.

No farmer is of any worth without good friends to call upon. I have been lucky to be a part of a welcoming and cohesive postgraduate community, and this thesis would have been twice as difficult had it not been for those who have become lifelong friends in Bristol. Thank you to all of those who have been there for me, especially my brother Harold, whose conversations and laughter have kept me down-to-earth. I am eternally grateful to my parents, who to this day put into practice what Virgil preaches in the *Georgics*. There are no words to express my gratitude to my partner Rachel – I simply would not have been able to get through this without her. This thesis is dedicated to my younger brother Sam, whose fortitude and goodwill in the darkest of times has shown me how to live, and why I write.

Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:Jack Thacker..... DATE:...19/07/2018.....

Contents

<i>Abbreviations</i>	1
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	2
Introduction: It Survives, A Way of Happening	4
What is Georgic?	13
An Alternative Tradition	20
Georgic for Our Time	27
Ted Hughes: Poet and Farmer	36
Seamus Heaney: The Theme is <i>Patria</i>	44
Alice Oswald: Not a Nature Poet?	53
I A Language of Livestock: Animal Husbandry in the Poetry of Ted Hughes	62
A 'workable language'	67
'Sympathetic husbandry'	73
'A utility general-purpose style'	76
The Animal Crush	85
II 'Back to the Ordinary': Ted Hughes's <i>Moortown Diary</i>	96
'A useful adjunct'	100
Shades of Influence	108
'Mid-devon's mud-lane annals'	116
'A guardian spirit of the land and language'	122
III 'Raggle-Taggle': Beyond Pastoral in Early Seamus Heaney	130
The Matter of Ireland	134
Heaney's Book of Hours	145
'A paradigm of earth'	154
The Arts of Peace	161
IV Seamus Heaney and the Georgic Turn: <i>District and Circle</i>	170
An Age of Iron	176
Georgics 'In Extremis'	185
The husbandry of years	194
V The Poet in the Garden: Little Sparta and Alice Oswald's Lyrics	202
The 'armoured farm'	208
Thingpoems	217
The Idea of a Mobile Poem	225
VI The Epic Poise: Alice Oswald's <i>Dart</i> and <i>Memorial</i>	233
Work in Progress	239
Shepherd of Selves	250
A Kind of Oral Cemetery	256
A History of Leaves	264
Conclusion: Digging the <i>Georgics</i>	270
<i>Bibliography</i>	281

Abbreviations

Ted Hughes

CP *Collected Poems*

LTH *Letters of Ted Hughes*

WP *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*

Alice Oswald

TGGS *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*

We *Woods etc.*

List of Illustrations

Figure 0.1	The Spokes of Virgil's Wheel	16
Figure 1.1	Ted Hughes, 'Drawing' of a Bull	90
Figure 1.2	Peter Redgrove, 'Ted Hughes dehorning a bull', 1970s	93
Figure 1.3	Photograph of Sexton the Bull	94
Figure 2.1	James Ravilious, 'Iddesleigh in high, dry summer', 1976	112
Figure 2.2	James Ravilious, 'A farming decision', June 1976	115
Figure 3.1	The Limbourg Brothers, <i>March</i> , c. 1412-1416	151
Figure 3.2	Pieter Bruegel the Elder, <i>Landscape with the Fall of Icarus</i> , c. 1555	153
Figure 4.1.	'Unknown Young Man, Ireland'	177
Figure 4.2	Albrecht Dürer, <i>Noli Me Tangere</i> , c. 1509/1510	197
Figure 5.1	Ian Hamilton Finlay and Richard Phetham, <i>Virgil</i> , 1999	211
Figure 5.2	Ian Hamilton Finlay and Richard Phetham, <i>Virgil</i> , 1999	211
Figure 5.3	Ian Hamilton Finlay, Nicholas Sloan, and Andrew Daish, <i>W. Shenstone 1714-63</i> , 1998	213
Figure 5.4	Richard Long, <i>Boyhood Line</i> , 2015	221
Figure 5.5	Andy Goldsworthy, <i>Balanced Rocks</i> , 1978	222
Figure 5.6.	Barbara Hepworth, <i>Mother and Child</i> , 1934	229
Figure 5.7.	Barbara Hepworth, <i>Corymb</i> , 1959	230
Figure 6.1.	Alice Oswald, Hand Drawn Map of <i>Dart</i>	246
Figure 6.2.	Postbridge: The Clapper Bridge	247
Figure 6.3	Flowers Between Graves, Arras Memorial, France	264
Figure 6.4	A Wall of Names, Arras Memorial, France	264

Good writing is not done unless there are serious forces at work; and it is not permanent unless it works for readers with opinions different from the author's.

William Empson, *Some Versions of the Pastoral*¹

This, then, will be my object: the insides of poems. This, then, my material: the innermost energy of the manual laborer.

Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*²

¹ William Empson, *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (1935) (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 3.

² Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. by Kenneth Haltman (Paris: The Dallas Institute, 2002), p. 6.

INTRODUCTION

It Survives, A Way of Happening

With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse

W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats'³

W. H. Auden's 1939 poem 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' is ostensibly an elegy, but its third and final section contains a subtle reference not to Yeats but to Virgil, specifically his *Georgics* (29 BCE). In Book II of the *Georgics*, Virgil instructs his audience on the cultivation of vines:

And now, the time when a vineyard puts off its reluctant leaves
And a bitter north wind has blown away the pride of the woodland,
Even now the countryman actively pushes on to the coming
Year and its tasks, attacking the naked vine with a curved
Pruning-knife he shears and trims it into shape.⁴

Virgil is known to have read aloud the four books of the *Georgics* – each one on a different aspect of agriculture: crops, vines, livestock, bees – to Octavian on his triumphant return from Actium and Alexandria in 29 BCE. For a poet writing in the shadow of bloody civil wars, the notion of good husbandry was important in a practical sense (Octavian's veterans were rewarded with land) but also in a figural and political sense: good farming implied good statesmanship.⁵ For Auden, writing at the end of the Spanish Civil War, and from the neutral

³ W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. 247-49 (p. 249).

⁴ Virgil, *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by C. Day Lewis (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p. 48. As this thesis is not a study of Virgil's Latin, I refer to a number of translations of the *Georgics* throughout, the choice of each one depending on the context and author being discussed. Day Lewis's translation is in this case appropriate for the reason that in a review of a new translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* in 1951, Auden quotes this extract from Day Lewis's version to illustrate his 'sensible choice' of a 'loose six-beat line' to match the original hexameter: see W. H. Auden, 'Aeneid for Our Time', a review of *The Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. by Rolfe Humphries (1951), in *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 6 vols (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996-2015), III: 1949-1955 (2008), pp. 242-45; review originally published in *The Nation*, 10 March 1951.

⁵ For overviews on the contexts of Virgil's *Georgics*, see L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Survey* (Cambridge; London; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1969), and Richard F. Thomas, 'Introduction', Virgil, *Georgics*, ed. by Richard F. Thomas, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University

shores of the United States on the eve of the Second World War ('In the nightmare of the dark | All the dogs of Europe bark'), good poetry implies good farming.⁶ In the final section of his poem, with its insistent rhythm and imperative tone, the activities of writing and farming provide a sense of consolation in dire circumstances: somehow 'the farming of a verse' is able to make 'a vineyard of the curse'.⁷ For both Virgil and Auden, the role of the 'countryman' is tied to the role of the poet, especially in times of war.

In 'Secondary Epic', composed two decades later in 1959, Auden reprimands Virgil's unification of the poetic and the political:

No, Virgil, no:
Not even the first of the Romans can learn
His Roman history in the future tense,
Not even to serve your political turn;
Hindsight as foresight makes no sense.⁸

In the earlier poem, however, which alludes not to the *Aeneid* but the *Georgics*, Auden appears to have more sympathy with Virgil's position. Auden's often-quoted maxim in the second section of his elegy for Yeats, 'poetry makes nothing happen', is commonly interpreted as an admission of the limited capacity of art to shape history.⁹ In an essay

Press, 1988), I: *Books I-II*, pp. 1-34. For in-depth examinations of Virgil's Latin see Thomas's commentary to Virgil, *Georgics*, ed. by Thomas, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and Michael C. J. Putnam, *Virgil's Poem of the Earth: Studies in the Georgics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

⁶ Auden, *Collected Poems*, p. 248. Incidentally, Auden's father George Auden (1872-1957) had the middle name 'Augustus' (*Letters from Iceland* (1937) bears a dedication to him), while Auden's brother Bernard (1900-1978) grew up to be a farmer.

⁷ John Fuller reads this reference to farming as an allusion to *Genesis* iii. 17: see John Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 289. It could also be an acknowledgement of a Jovian fall, as described in the *Georgics*, I. 121-35: 'for the father of agriculture | Gave us a hard calling: he first decreed it an art | To work the fields, sent worries to sharpen our mortal wits | And would not allow his realm to grow listless from lethargy' (Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Day Lewis, p. 19). Fuller also draws attention to the notion that the 'scattering' and 'modification' of lines 18 and 23 in the poem's first section 'may be intended as a kind of sacramental metaphor of sowing, reaping and digesting bread' (p. 287). For Lucy MacDiarmid, in *Auden's Apologies for Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), the idea that because of poetry 'vineyards thrive' is 'all very pretty, but', she proceeds to ask, 'how does it happen?' (p. 28). A georgic interpretation, however, would be mindful of the hard work in all forms of cultivation.

⁸ W. H. Auden, 'Secondary Epic', *Collected Poems*, pp. 598-600 (p. 598). For Theodore Ziolkowski, drawing attention to Auden's 'detailed acquaintance with the relevant passages of the *Aeneid*', the poet's attitude to Virgil is not as contemptuous as the poem first suggests, and is, rather, 'exemplary' of his generation's view of Virgil: 'admiration qualified by irony'. Theodore Ziolkowski, *Virgil and the Moderns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 140-41.

⁹ The poem first appeared in *The New Republic*, 8 March 1939, but the middle section containing the famous maxim had not yet been written. A revised version, with the added second section, appeared in *The London Mercury* in April 1939 and later in the collection *Another Time* (1940). Edward Mendelson writes that 'the statement that "poetry makes nothing happen" simply means it has no effect on private or public acts'; see *Later*

published in the same year, ‘The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats’, Auden appears to substantiate this view. Arguing in defence of Yeats that ‘art is a product of history, not a cause’, he proceeds to take down the ‘fallacious belief that art ever makes anything happen’ by stating: ‘if not a poem had been written, not a picture painted, not a bar of music composed, the history of man would be materially unchanged’.¹⁰ But this view represents only one side of Auden’s argument. In the case for ‘The Public Prosecutor’, put forward in anticipation of his defence, he writes that the idea that poetry exists ‘in some private garden of its own, totally unrelated to the workaday world, and to be judged by pure aesthetic standards alone’ is ‘an illusion’.¹¹ In both cases Auden is ventriloquizing a stance, presenting his argument as part of an imaginary courtroom debate, and he may well put this idea forward precisely for the purpose of knocking it down in the defence.¹² The essay concludes, however, in the absence of a verdict, leaving the final judgement up to the reader. Hindsight as foresight, from a critical perspective, makes sense in this case, for as it turns out Auden’s apolitical turn in the late 1930s corresponds to the ambiguity of Virgil’s *Georgics*.

These battle lines drawn by Auden are cut through by a third perspective. The double meaning of the phrase ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ – to signify both that nothing comes of it *and* that nothing is still *something* – is Auden’s point. This emerges when the maxim is read in context:

Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making, where executives
Would never want to tamper; flows on south

Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. 13. The maxim has been widely discussed elsewhere; relevant interpretations will be referred to below (footnote 33). For an extensive overview of responses to Auden’s words and their implications see Peter Robinson, *Poetry, Poets, Readers: Making Things Happen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

¹⁰ W. H. Auden, ‘The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats’, in *Prose*, ed. by Mendelson, 6 vols, II: 1939-1948 (2002), pp. 3-7 (p. 7), originally published in the *Partisan Review*, Spring 1939.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹² Critics seem to agree that Auden’s defence of Yeats, and therefore his argument against poetry as a political force, come out on top: for Samuel Hynes, ‘the defence get the best lines’, while Tony Sharpe maintains that ‘Auden clinche[s] the case for the defence’: see Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London; Sydney; Toronto: The Bodley Head, 1976), p. 350, and Tony Sharpe, ‘Introduction’, in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. by Tony Sharpe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-9 (p. 6).

From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
A way of happening, a mouth.¹³

Here, Auden's statement sets into motion a series of observations on the nature of poetry articulated in terms of a landscape. For Auden, poetry is like a river, springing from a valley and moving across the land before widening out to an estuary, 'a mouth'. As the flow of language is traced in these lines, so too is the progress of material goods from 'ranches' to 'raw towns', from country to city, from agriculture to industry. Here, poetry is very much part of the 'workaday world' and the emphasis is not so much on an abstract 'nothing' but on the survival of poetry away from the political centre as part of the everyday lives and livelihoods of the inhabitants of marginal places. When read in the light of Auden's allusion to Virgil in the final part of the poem, this passage reads not as elegy but as georgic: poetry is figured as 'a way of happening' in terms of a work ethic and responsibility towards one's homeland.

'In Memory of W. B. Yeats' was the first poem Auden wrote after abandoning his own homeland for New York in 1939. The references to 'ranches' and 'raw towns' evoke a North American setting, and, as Mendelson puts it, Auden's river is 'as American as the Mississippi, flowing south past ranches and raw towns, in the country Auden had chosen partly because few of its citizens suffered from the delusion that poetry was something worth tampering with'.¹⁴ Yet, without ruling out the possibility that it represents the England of Auden's upbringing in the North, the landscape is also Yeats's Ireland, with 'her madness'

¹³ Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', p. 248. Auden revised the original 'Valley of its saying' to 'Valley of its making' to place an emphasis on poetry as 'making' (*poesis*), highlighting its similarities with other kinds of human activity in the landscape.

¹⁴ Mendelson, *Later Auden*, p. 13. Auden's move to the United States in 1939 was followed by three more relocations, to Italy in 1948, to Austria in 1958, with Auden returning to England and Oxford in 1972. As Mendelson explains, Auden's poems are intimately connected to these different national terrains: 'each move coincided with fundamental changes in his work and outlook, and brought him to the landscape he thought most suitable to the kind of poetry he wanted to write' (p. xviii). For more on the landscapes of Auden's poetry see Paola Marchetti, 'Auden's Landscapes', in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 200-11.

and ‘her weather’.¹⁵ As well as being an allegorical landscape characteristic of Auden, the valley described is also a georgic terrain, that of Virgil’s Italy, where farming and poetry exist on the same plane (pun intended), and where the slopes are lined with vineyards.¹⁶ Indeed, the poem anticipates what Sharpe refers to as the ‘Italo-Pennine’ landscape of the later poem ‘In Praise of Limestone’ (1948), demonstrating how even at this stage in his career Auden was learning to ‘flow in a Latinate style’.¹⁷

Just over a year after Auden wrote ‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats’, his contemporary, the Anglo-Irish poet C. Day Lewis, published a new translation of Virgil’s *Georgics* (1940), prefaced by a series of ‘Dedicatory Stanzas’ to another contemporary, Stephen Spender. Day Lewis’s stanzas mirror Auden’s second section of his elegy almost precisely in terms of rhyme and form (Auden’s ten-line stanza of iambic pentameter in a scheme of *abbaccddcd* in Day Lewis’s version is rearranged in stanzas of *abbabcddc*); they also echo Auden’s in terms of sentiment. Day Lewis observes that ‘Poets are not much in demand these days’ and how ‘Aiming at art, we only strike the arty.’¹⁸ He goes on to demonstrate a firmer commitment than Auden to the idea that poetry is politically accountable and that ‘poets must speak for common suffering men | While history in sheets of fire is writing’.¹⁹ Yet, like Auden, he too turns to ‘country matters’ as opposed to writing directly about war: ‘taking a leaf from Virgil’s laurel’, he writes, ‘I sang in time of war the arts of peace’.²⁰

Virgil may have had the ear of Octavian when he presented his arts of peace, but was the soon-to-be emperor listening? At the end of Book I of the *Georgics* (ll. 505-14), the poet

¹⁵ Employing an appropriately georgic analogy, Sharpe observes how the notion of northerliness ‘form[s] a constant in [Auden’s] writing, in which literary, political, sexual and religious elements are at various times visible, grafted onto some obscure – but, for him, resonant – locations’: see Tony Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, in *W. H. Auden in Context*, ed. by Sharpe, pp. 13-23 (p. 14).

¹⁶ Auden’s Italian summer house on the island of Ischia, in the bay of Naples, is part of the same landscape in which, as the poet discloses at the end of Book IV (l. 564), Virgil composed the *Georgics*. In his own poem ‘Ischia’ (1948), Auden refers to Naples as ‘Parthenopea’ after the manner of Virgil, and, as Fuller observes in Virgilian terms, the poem ‘expresses the *otium* of Auden’s Mediterranean period’ (Fuller, p. 413).

¹⁷ Sharpe, ‘Auden’s Northerliness’, pp. 21-22; Auden, ‘Secondary Epic’, p. 599.

¹⁸ C. Day Lewis, ‘Dedicatory Stanzas: To Stephen Spender’, *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by Day Lewis, pp. 9-11 (p. 9).

¹⁹ Day Lewis, ‘Dedicatory Stanzas’, p. 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

warns of a situation that resonated with its wartime translator Day Lewis, who chose these lines as the epigraph to his modern-day version:

For Right and Wrong are confused here, there's so much war in the world,
Evil has so many faces, the plough so little
Honour, the labourers are taken, the fields untended,
And the curving sickle is beaten into the sword that yields not.
There the East is in arms, here Germany marches:
Neighbour cities, breaking their treaties, attack each other:
The wicked War-god runs amok through all the world.
So, when racing chariots have rushed from the starting-gate,
They gather speed on the course, and the driver tugs at the curb-rein
– His horses runaway, car out of control, quite helpless.²¹

The poet may be helpless to influence the course of history, but there is a compensatory note in standing up for the people and places overlooked by warring states. In this sense, as in Auden's poem, poetry is about what happens away from the political sphere – or 'outside history', to echo the contemporary Irish poet Evan Boland's phrase used to describe the silence of women in poetic tradition.²² Day Lewis saw his translation as a 'valediction' to the rural places and people of Devon, where he was living at the time.²³ Not only this, but Virgil's *Georgics* turned out to be an important precedent in the debate surrounding the autonomy of poetry, enabling him to negotiate the extremes of the overtly political and the purely aesthetic. On the one hand, his recourse to 'country matters' could be seen as a retreat from an increasingly war-torn and complex modern world; on the other, his identification with the countryside is an act of defiance in itself, a call to recognise the importance of the 'arts of peace', with poetry and farming foremost among them.

The *Georgics* may have highlighted the continuities between the classical and the modern for Day Lewis, but for the poets of the 1930s, himself among them, it also inevitably

²¹ *Georgics*, trans. by Day Lewis, I, 504-14, p. 31.

²² Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp. 123-53. Boland writes: 'If a poet does not tell the truth about time, his or her work will not survive it. Past or present, there is a human dimension to time, human voices within it and human griefs ordained by it. Our present will become the past of other men and women. We depend on them to remember it with the complexity with which it was suffered' (p. 153).

²³ See C. Day Lewis, *The Buried Day* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), pp. 233-34.

emphasised the differences.²⁴ In Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Journal* (1939), one passage in particular describes agricultural realities as the poet saw them:

In the days that were early the music came easy
On cradle and coffin, in the corn and the barn,
Songs for the reaping and spinning and only the shepherd
Then as now was silent beside the tarn:
Cuffs of foam around the beer-brown water,
Crinkled water and a mackerel sky;
It is all in the day's work – the grey stones and heather
And the sheep that breed and break their legs and die.
The uplands now as then are fresh but in the valley
Polluted rivers run – the Lethe and the Styx;
The soil is tired and the profit little and the hunchback
Bobs on a carthorse round the sodden ricks.
Sing us no more idylls, no more pastorals,
No more epics of the English earth;
The country is a dwindling annexe to the factory,
Squalid as an after-birth.²⁵

If at first MacNeice suggests a continuity between the past and present – 'now as then' – it soon becomes apparent that in his view such comparisons are not to be celebrated. He shows how even if in former times the songs 'came easy' the work itself was as gruelling as it is in his day. The reality of shepherding is injury and death for the sheep, and added to this the modern farmer inhabits an environment polluted by industry, where the soil is 'tired' from being overworked. Like the landscape in Auden's elegy for Yeats, MacNeice's has classical parallels, but in this case the rivers are those of the underworld, suggesting that the rural population have become a kind of underclass. In contrast to Auden's formulation, MacNeice's account indicates that the executives' language of 'profit' is very much part of the life and language of farming – and, by extension, poetry itself – with the result being one

²⁴ In a remarkable passage in Day Lewis's 'Foreword' to his translation, he offers a utopian prediction based upon the values of Virgil's poem but arising out of modern technologies and circumstances: 'it may, indeed, happen that this war, together with the spread of electrical power, will result in a decentralization of industry and the establishment of a new rural-urban civilisation working through smaller units. The factory in the fields need not remain a dream of poets and planners: it has more to commend it than the allotment in the slums.' C. Day Lewis, 'Foreword', *Georgics*, trans. by Day Lewis, p. 7. Both Day Lewis and Spender, author of the poem 'Pylons' (1933), were among the group known as the 'Pylon Boys' – which also included Auden and Louis MacNeice – a label coined by Cyril Connolly to describe 1930s poets' self-conscious inclusions of industrial features of the landscape in their poems. For a further example see Day Lewis's poem 'Look west, Wystan, lone flyer', from *The Magnetic Mountain* (1933).

²⁵ Louis MacNeice, 'Autumn Journal: XVIII', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Peter McDonald (London: Faber and Faber, 2016), pp. 144-47 (p. 144).

of depression, inequality, and the extraction of wealth from the country to the city.²⁶ When it comes to representations of the rural, in MacNeice's eyes, classical forms will no longer suffice.²⁷ Implicit in his condemnation of 'idylls', 'pastorals', and 'epics of the English earth' is a rejection of English versions of the *Georgics*.²⁸ Yet, as the examples of Auden and Day Lewis demonstrate, for some writers the georgic proved fruitful as a transitional mode at the end of what Auden saw as a 'low, dishonest decade' on the eve of war.²⁹

This thesis asks whether the analogy between poetry and farming holds true today, under different conditions. In his 1952 'Bucolics' poem 'Woods', Auden famously claimed that 'a culture is no better than its woods.'³⁰ More recently, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Roger Deakin has argued that Auden's dictum 'would ring just as true for rivers.'³¹ The same could be said for a culture's farms. As Raymond Williams reminds us, 'culture in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops and animals.'³² Culture and cultivation share the same origin, and, if Auden, Day Lewis, and MacNeice are to be believed, they continue to reflect one another. Writing in 1940, Auden

²⁶ Valentine Cunningham has shown how 1930s poets were 'obsessed by the topography of England' and how this was not only a right-wing phenomenon, as might be expected, but that many from the period's Left engaged with rural nostalgias and movements: see Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 226, pp. 211-40. For more on this, and Day Lewis as a case in point, see Albert Gelpi, *Living in Time: The Poetry of C. Day Lewis* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 82-89.

²⁷ MacNeice himself employed classical pastoral forms throughout the 1930s, explicitly in 'Eclogue for Christmas' (1933), 'Eclogue by a Five-barred Gate' (1934), 'Eclogue between the Motherless' (1936), and in 'Eclogue from Iceland' as part of his 1937 collaboration with Auden *Letters from Iceland*. Furthermore, in a review of a different 1944 translation of the *Georgics*, MacNeice comments on the 'Virgilian glamour' of the original and commends Day Lewis's translation for its technical accomplishment: see Louis MacNeice, 'The Elusive Classics', a review of Virgil, *The Eclogues and the Georgics*, trans. by R. C. Trevelyan (1944), in *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by Alex Heuser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 124-77. For more on MacNeice's engagement with the classics see Peter McDonald, "'My Eyes Turned Down on the Past": MacNeice's Classicism', in *Louis MacNeice and his Influence*, ed. by Kathleen Devine and Alan J. Peacock (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1998), pp. 34-52; and for the pastoral and georgic in particular see Edna Longley, *Louis MacNeice: A Study* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp. 101-03, Valentine Cunningham, 'MacNeice and Thirties (Classical) Pastoralism', in *Incorrigibly Plural: Louis MacNeice and his Legacy*, ed. by Fran Brearton and Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 2012), pp. 85-100, and Seamus Heaney, 'Eclogues "In Extremis": On the Staying Power of Pastoral', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 103C.1 (2003), 1-12, (pp. 9-11).

²⁸ For an overview of early-twentieth-century English 'modern georgicists' see Ziolkowski, pp. 104-29.

²⁹ W. H. Auden, 'September 1, 1939', *Selected Poems* ed. by Edward Mandelsson (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), pp. 86-89 (p. 86).

³⁰ W. H. Auden, 'Bucolics 2. Woods', *Collected Poems*, p. 560.

³¹ Roger Deakin, 'Foreword', *The River's Voice: An Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Angela King and Susan Clifford (Totnes: Green Books, 2000), pp. 15-18 (p. 15).

³² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), p. 87.

noted that culture ‘is something to be won, and difficult to retain’.³³ The following argument is concerned above all with the way in which a specifically georgic cultural outlook has been retained in British and Irish poetry in the generations following Auden and his contemporaries.

Culture, in Auden’s sense, is a process, a struggle. As in his poem, ‘it survives’ as ‘a way of happening’ in the same way that farming does: through toil.³⁴ This thesis argues for the survival of the georgic – Virgil’s poetry of *labor improbus*, or ‘unremitting labour’ as Day Lewis translates it – in contemporary British and Irish poetry, focusing on the work of three poets: Ted Hughes (1930-1998), Seamus Heaney (1939-2013), and Alice Oswald (1960–).³⁵ It takes issue with the claim of John Goodridge, in his study of eighteenth-century rural poetry, that ‘georgic poetry [...] is no longer written’, and with Greg Garrard when he states in relation to the burgeoning field of ecocriticism that ‘the georgic model is of diminishing relevance’ in western culture.³⁶ Now, as much as in any time in history, it will be argued, the georgic remains of continuing and vital relevance to poets writing in English. As the six chapters that make up this investigation reveal, the georgic proves to be a crucial factor in these writers’ engagements with economic (in the case of Hughes), political (in Heaney), and environmental (Oswald) issues and crises over the last fifty years. Before such contexts are mapped out in detail, however, it is first necessary to define the concept at the heart of this thesis.

³³ W. H. Auden, “‘What is Culture?’”, a review of Gaetano Salvemini, *Historian and Scientist* (1939), in *Prose*, ed. by Mendelson, 6 vols, II: 1939-1948 (2002), pp. 72-73 (p. 73), originally published in *The Nation*, 6 July 1940.

³⁴ Hynes reads in Auden’s *Elegy for Yeats* an affirmation of ‘the survival of art in a bad time’ (Hynes, p. 353). Likewise, for Neil Corcoran, Auden’s statement that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ carries the meaning that ‘poetry survives as counter or oppositional’: ‘flowing, purifying, making a place for itself, pressing on’: see Neil Corcoran, *Poetry and Responsibility* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p. 10. Correspondingly, for Sharpe, Auden’s processes in the poem are those of ‘poetic survival’ (Sharpe, ‘Introduction’, p. 7).

³⁵ I. 145-46: see *Georgics*, trans by Day Lewis, p. 19.

³⁶ John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth Century Rural Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 180; Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 129.

What is Georgic?

In his extensive investigation into *What is Pastoral?* (1996), Paul Alpers observes that, despite the fact that the pastoral is a familiar topic in the study of literature, ‘there is no principle account of it on which most people agree, and it sometimes seems as if there are as many versions of the pastoral as there are critics and scholars who write about it’.³⁷ Alpers’s phrasing alludes to William Empson’s seminal work *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935).

Empson’s study, published in the same milieu as Auden, Day Lewis and MacNeice’s classical reworkings, redefined the parameters of what could be considered pastoral literature, identifying works as wide-ranging as twentieth-century proletarian literature, John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* as examples of the category.³⁸

Empson famously shows how ‘the pastoral process’ is one of ‘putting the complex into the simple’, and of finding in representations of ‘a limited life’ (typically that of simple, rural people) the ‘grand notion of the inadequacy of life’ in general.³⁹ The pastoral is, however, as Alpers elaborates on Empson, never ‘too complex’ (emphasis in original).⁴⁰ As Terry Gifford

³⁷ Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 8. For an overview of the criticism gestured to in this statement, see Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, p. 11, n. 4. Alpers’s diagnosis has been exemplified by more recent efforts to define the pastoral, with critics interpreting the pastoral in increasingly various and generalised terms. Terry Gifford examines its ‘kinds’ in light of environmental issues in *Pastoral* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 1999; repr. 2010), as does Ken Hiltner in *What Else is Pastoral?: Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (Ithaca, NY.; London: Cornell University Press, 2011), for whom ‘Renaissance pastoral is a highly figurative mode of writing that has little to do with the countryside—and everything to do with culture and politics’ (p. 1). For editors of a recent edition of collected essays, ‘the space offered by pastoral is a place for convening and addressing, albeit in limited scope, questions about humanity itself and its relationship with the natural world’: see Mathilde Skoie, and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez, ‘Introduction’, in *Pastoral and The Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed*, ed. by Mathilde Skoie and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), pp. xi-xv (p. xv). See also Thomas K. Hubbard, *The Pipes of Pan: Intertextuality and Literary Filiation in the Pastoral Tradition from Theocritus to Milton* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); for Hubbard, pastoral is more an issue of ‘tradition’ and ‘convention’ rather than ‘theme’ or ‘genre’ (pp. 4-5).

³⁸ See Empson. For the historical and political context of Empson’s study see Hynes, pp. 160-76, and for its conception and development see John Haffenden, *William Empson: Among the Mandarins* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 376-99.

³⁹ Empson, p. 115. For Andrew Ettin, Empson’s is the ‘the most important and least helpful’ of approaches to the subject: see Andrew Ettin, *Literature and the Pastoral* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 189, cited in Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 7, n. 7. This opinion is echoed by Alpers, who states that Empson’s ‘coruscating brilliance and idiosyncrasies of manner have made it as difficult to use as it is easy to admire’. Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, p. 37. Despite the difficulty of putting Empson to use, his definition continues to prove influential, as evidenced in the attitudes of the number of recent critics who echo the formula in their own approaches (see footnote 36 above).

⁴⁰ Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, p. 43.

sees it, it requires a ‘distance’ from the realism of the georgic, for instance, which also focuses on the rural, to ensure that its ‘artifice’ is ‘transparent’ to the reader.⁴¹ The distinction Gifford touches upon, here, is crucial: if complexity is only ever implicit in the pastoral, in the georgic it defines its very nature. To paraphrase Empson, the georgic, as opposed to the pastoral, is about foregrounding the complexity of the complex.

Part of the reason why the georgic is such a complex term, aside from its own inner workings (which, as we shall see, are also extremely complicated), is that it suffers from a similar lack of critical consensus as the pastoral, with the added factor of less familiarity and fewer critics and theorists writing about it. To complicate things further, it is also widely understood as a subcategory of pastoral itself, thus making it doubly problematic as a subcategory of an already contested term.⁴² Deriving from the ancient Greek γεωργικός, meaning ‘agricultural’, the word ‘georgic’ comes from the Latin *georgicus* and translates into ‘a poem concerning agriculture’ (*OED*). For Alpers, the pastoral and georgic are distinct due to the fact that in the latter ‘nature’s uncertainties and harshness are more prominent, because it is conceived as the habitation of farmers’.⁴³ It is surprising to find such a straightforward and binary statement used to distinguish between pastoral and georgic in Alpers (shepherds versus farmers, pastoral versus arable), especially when he is so detailed in his investigation into the nature of the pastoral itself. This thesis does not seek to match Alpers in his thoroughness when it comes to the georgic (this would require an entirely separate and more extensive investigation), but it does assume a level of complexity in the georgic, as well as in the way it has traditionally been categorised, that would warrant an equal level of attention. As David Fairer observes, there has been an ‘unfortunate tendency’ in critical accounts to

⁴¹ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 1999; repr. 2010), p. 20.

⁴² As Alastair Fowler observes, in what is a typical complaint for those working on the georgic, ‘the “label” pastoral tends to be attached to both genres, as if the georgic were merely another of Empson’s versions of the pastoral’; see ‘Georgic and Pastoral: Laws of Genre in the Seventeenth Century’, in *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land*, ed. by Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), pp. 81-88.

⁴³ Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, p. 28.

allow the pastoral and the georgic to ‘merge’: ‘being a capacious and varied genre,’ he explains, ‘georgic can happily incorporate pastoral elements into the mix; but the reverse would be incongruous.’⁴⁴ With this dynamic in mind, this thesis puts forward the case that the georgic is arguably more complex than the pastoral, and therefore requires further work when it comes to delineating the differences, as well as the similarities, between the two modes.

The ‘uncertainties’ that Alpers identifies as characteristic of georgic literature also govern its reception and theorisation. One of the main points of disagreement for commentators has been how to refer to it: as style, form, kind, genre, or mode. Alpers argues that pastoral is a mode in that it is ‘a broad and flexible category that includes, but is not confined to, a number of identifiable genres’.⁴⁵ Crucially, the distinction between the georgic as a genre or a mode, aside from the other categories, depends on whether it is to be classed as a ‘version’ of the pastoral itself or as an equivalent mode. The following brief survey of the georgic in English shows it to be precisely this: an equivalent mode, which, through a process of evolution and ‘modulation’, comes to possess its own ‘versions’, and a number of these, as it will later be shown, are to be found in contemporary British and Irish poetry.⁴⁶ What is attempted here is not a fundamental definition of the georgic, for this would be, as Annabel Patterson points out in the case of the pastoral, ‘impossible’.⁴⁷ Rather, instead of trying to define what the georgic *is*, the emphasis is on how it has been *used* as a critical tool throughout history.

⁴⁴ David Fairer, ‘Georgic’, in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 457-72 (p. 465).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁶ For an overview of ‘georgic modulation’ focusing on examples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Alistair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to Theories of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982; repr. 2002), pp. 202-06.

⁴⁷ Patterson, p. 7.

Lowly (<i>humilis</i>) style	Middle (<i>mediocris</i>) style	Weighty (<i>gravis</i>) style
shepherd at ease	farmer	soldier, ruler
Tityrus, Meliboeus	Triptolemus, Coelius	Hector, Ajax
sheep	cow	horse
crook	plow	sword
pasture	field	city, camp
beech	apple, pear	laurel, cedar

Figure 0.1, ‘The Spokes of Virgil’s Wheel’ in table format, reproduced from Wilson-Okamura, p. 91.

In his *Parisiana Poetria* (c. 1240), the thirteenth-century grammarian and poet John of Garland evinced a schema by which to interpret Virgil’s three works. The purpose of his *Rota Virgilli* or ‘Virgil’s Wheel’ was to divide Virgil’s *oeuvre* – *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid* – into pastoral, georgic, and epic, corresponding to three distinct styles: low, middle and high (Figure 0.1).⁴⁸ Garland’s aim was to teach decorum, instructing the reader – and writers – on which subjects were suitable to each style: shepherd for low, farmer for middle, soldier for high, and so on.⁴⁹ According to this hierarchy, georgic and pastoral were seen as distinct and not to be mixed. However, as David Scott Wilson-Okamura has pointed out, contrary to the misconception that ‘Virgil’s Wheel’ represents a ‘progression of genres’, Renaissance poets in fact interpreted the ‘wheel’ according to a ‘spectrum of styles’.⁵⁰ The spectrum turns out to be a useful concept when considering the georgic tradition more

⁴⁸ John of Garland, *Parisiana Poetria*, trans. by Traugott Lawler (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 39-41.

⁴⁹ Garland, p. 87.

⁵⁰ David Scott Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 90-93. For more on Virgil’s wheel and its evolution in the Renaissance period see Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 240-41, and Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 3-4. Fowler explains how during the Renaissance the *Rota Virgilli* was modified to oust the georgic, with the new system comprising of Tragedy-Comedy-Satire (p. 240). As Low points out, however, ‘English poets did not ignore georgic altogether in this period’, as he goes on to demonstrate: despite a ‘contempt for labor, especially manual and agricultural labor’, among the ruling classes, the seventeenth century witnessed what he defines as a ‘georgic revolution’ both within and outside the literary sphere, thanks in a large part to the role of the Civil War (p. 5). For more on the presence of the georgic in the early modern period and seventeenth century in particular see Alistair Fowler, ‘The Beginnings of English Georgic’, in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 105-25, and Fowler, ‘Pastoral and Georgic’. For its absence see Katherine C. Little, *Transforming Work: Early Modern Pastoral and Late Medieval Poetry* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 9-10.

generally, as there has been a significant degree of overlap between the georgic and the pastoral in particular. The georgic has been referred to in many different ways since Garland's stylistic approach, but the relationship between subject and expression has remained a constant preoccupation.

In 'An Essay on the Georgics', published as a foreword to John Dryden's influential 1697 translation, Joseph Addison comments upon the marginal status of the *Georgics* in relation to Virgil's other works: 'there has been an abundance of Criticism spent on *Virgil's Pastorals* and *Aeneids*', he states:

but the *Georgics* are a Subject which none of the *Criticks* have sufficiently taken into their Consideration; most of 'em passing over it in silence, or casting it under the same head with *Pastoral*; a division by no means proper.⁵¹

For Addison, the success of georgic poetry remains a question of style but for him it was not so much a case of aligning form and content as of using literary language to elevate base material. Maintaining the 'Style which is proper to a *Georgic*', he states, requires a special effort on behalf of the poet: 'he ought in particular', claims Addison, 'to be careful of not letting his Subject debase his Stile, and betray him into a meanness of Expression, but every where to keep up his Verse in all the Pomp of Numbers, and Dignity of words.'⁵² A successful georgic poem, according to Addison, is dependent upon a careful balancing of the 'meanness' of the subject (agriculture), the metre ('pomp of numbers'), and the language ('dignity of words'). In Virgil, who is described with sufficient pomp in the essay as 'a *Roman Dictator at the Plow-Tail*', Addison finds a mastery of these three facets.⁵³ The achievement of Virgil's *Georgics*, as opposed to other classical examples of the genre such as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, for instance, remains for Addison a question of decorum.⁵⁴ The

⁵¹ Joseph Addison, 'An Essay on the Georgics', in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker and others, 20 vols (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1956-2002), V: *Poems: The Works of Virgil in English 1697*, ed. by Alan Roper and Vinton A. Dearing (1987), pp. 145-53 (p. 145).

⁵² Addison, 'An Essay on the Georgics', p. 149.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150. The ancient Greek Hesiod's didactic and agricultural *Works and Days* (c. late-eighth century BC) is considered one of the primary source texts for Virgil's poem.

pastoral may imitate ‘the Stile of a Husbandman’, he stresses, but the georgic must be spoken ‘with the Address of the Poet.’⁵⁵

Addison does not go so far as to label the *Georgics* Virgil’s greatest work – this he reserves for the ‘nobler’ *Aeneid* – but he does describe the poem as ‘more perfect in its kind’ than the later epic.⁵⁶ Style is evidently of great importance to Addison, but it alone constitutes one half of what makes up a literary ‘kind’. Whereas for Addison the *Georgics* were second best to the *Aeneid*, Dryden himself reserves no such status for Virgil’s epic. In his dedication to the Earl of Chesterfield which prefaces his translation, he describes the *Georgics* as quite simply ‘the best Poem of the best Poet’.⁵⁷ As Richard F. Thomas has pointed out, ‘the eighteenth-century reception of the *Georgics* was almost the reverse of that of the *Aeneid*, which went into decline in part as a result of Dryden’s (overly monarchical) translation of that poem.’⁵⁸ If Dryden’s couplets proved too much for the *Aeneid*, they appear to have had the effect of raising the *Georgics* to a popularity and a pomp equivalent to his own estimations. Published after the Restoration, Dryden’s Virgil had a political as well as a cultural significance.⁵⁹

The ultimate measure of the success of Dryden’s *Georgics*, along with Addison’s essay, is in the amount of translations and imitations written in their wake.⁶⁰ In the eighteenth

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 145.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 152.

⁵⁷ John Dryden, ‘Dedication of the *Georgics* to the Earl of Chesterfield’, in *The Works of John Dryden*, V, ed. by Roper and Dearing, pp. 137-44 (p. 137).

⁵⁸ Richard F. Thomas, ‘The *Georgics* of Resistance: From Virgil to Heaney’, *Vergilius*, 47 (2001), 117-47 (p. 128).

⁵⁹ Johnson, ‘Dryden’, p. 144. Indeed, in the case of Dryden’s *Georgics* both form and subject matter proved particularly appropriate for the conditions. As Colin Burrow explains, the historical context combined with Dryden’s tendency to elaborate on Virgil’s metaphors, encouraging the reproduction and exaggeration of the interplay between the political and the agricultural which was already latent in the Latin: see Colin Burrow, ‘Virgil in Translation’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. by Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 21-37 (pp. 28-29).

⁶⁰ In the wave of accompanying translations, not all received Dryden kindly. In 1724, William Benson published *Virgil’s Husbandry*, which paired Book II of Dryden’s text with the Latin and provided accompanying notes by Benson. The publication is trenchantly critical of Dryden, not only in terms of his interpretation but also in terms of his style. Yet many of Benson’s observations only serve to re-affirm the cultural impact of Dryden’s translation, with him claiming in his introduction to Book II that ‘there is more of Virgil’s Husbandry in England at this instant than in Italy itself’: see William Benson, *Virgil’s Husbandry, Or an Essay on Virgil’s Georgics: Being the Second Book Translated into English Verse. To which are added the Latin Text and Mr. Dryden’s Version. With Notes Critical, and Rustick* (London: William and John Innys, 1724), p. xvi.

century, the vogue for Virgil set off by these endorsements gave rise to what became a highly fashionable – if easy to parody – genre of the georgic, one that still influences how the term is perceived and defined today.⁶¹ From John Philip’s 1708 two-book poem *Cyder*, to William Cowper’s *The Task: A Poem in Six Books* published in 1785, large-scale imitations of Virgil’s *Georgics* were the primary genre of rural poetry written in English during the period.⁶² Much of the theorising around the georgic in literary criticism in recent years has focused on this phenomenon, and a great deal of it proves to be of value when it comes to thinking about the georgic in broader terms.⁶³ However, the eighteenth-century narrowing of what was meant by georgic has also to a certain extent closed down the debate, in that critical accounts of the georgic in English rarely look beyond the Romantic period. There is also the issue of the ‘English georgic’, as it has come to be known, being aligned with certain ideological principles attached to nation-building and imperialism during a time when Britain was undergoing dramatic changes at home and abroad. In an age which saw the expansion of British trade across the globe, the transformation of rural cycles into agricultural industries

⁶¹ One authoritative encyclopedia, for instance, defines the georgic as ‘a didactic poem primarily intended to give directions concerning some skill, art, or science’, a definition that is in fact much closer to eighteenth-century versions than it is to Virgil’s original: J. E. Conington, and T. V. F. Brogan, ‘Georgic’, in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 461-62 (p. 461).

⁶² Other significant examples include James Thomson’s popular and influential *The Seasons* (1730), John Dyer’s celebration of the wool-trade, *The Fleece: A Poem in Four Books* (1757), and James Grainger’s four-book poem *The Sugar Cane* (1764), a colonial version of the genre. This is not the place to provide a broader or detailed overview of seventeenth and eighteenth-century georgic poems. For such surveys see John Chalker, *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), Wilkinson, pp. 270-313, and Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry*. See also more recent accounts (footnote 63 below).

⁶³ Since Chalker’s and Wilkinson’s contributions there has been a growing interest in the georgic tradition in English from the sixteenth century onwards and especially in the eighteenth century. Again, I do not have the space nor the capacity to provide an overview of the depth and breadth of this criticism here. For a list of key works, however, see Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 149-151, n. 32. In addition to specific works listed by Goodman (these shall be referenced elsewhere), I have found particularly helpful: Bridget Keegan, ‘Georgic Transformations and Stephen Duck’s “The Thresher’s Labour”’, *SEL* 41.3 (Summer 2001), 545-62; and Donna Landry, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001). I have also benefitted from several pieces by David Fairer: ‘Persistence, Adaptations and Transformations in Pastoral and Georgic Poetry’, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 259-86; “‘Where Fuming Trees Refresh the Thirsty Air’: The World of Eco-Georgic”, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 40 (2011), 201-18; and ‘Georgic’, in addition to Juan Christian Pellicer, ‘The Georgic’, in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 403-16.

was reflected in the translation of the Augustan georgic into a form suitable, as Karen O'Brien has shown, for the praise of the British Empire.⁶⁴ John Goodridge explains how 'georgic poems were *expected* to have opinions' (emphasis in original), but, as in the case of Dyer's *The Fleece*, he goes on to admit, they were 'opinions that we may not agree with':

it is difficult, for example, in our post-industrial age, to imagine anyone describing a northern English city with its smoky factory chimneys the way Dyer does, when he writes of 'busy Leeds, up-wafting to the clouds / The incense of thanksgiving' [III. 309-10], or eulogising carcinogenic asbestos as a 'wondrous rock...of which are wov'n / Vests incombustible' [II. 367].⁶⁵

The remainder of this introduction puts forward the case that the georgic is of continuing relevance in post-industrial times. In order for georgic to remain palatable in the context of modern and contemporary poetry, an alternative tradition must first be taken into account. How is it possible, for instance, to reconcile the imperialistic interpretation and imitation of Virgil's *Georgics* in the eighteenth century with the redemptive tone of Auden and Day Lewis's responses at the end of the 1930s? The answer lies in the conception of a version of the georgic that constitutes a radical reimagining of Virgil's original.

An Alternative Tradition

As Kurt Heinzelman states in his influential account: 'the georgic both did and did not vanish in the Romantic period, depending on which sense of "georgic" one means.'⁶⁶ As he goes on to explain, 'the explicit, acknowledged, and verifiable uses of georgic in the eighteenth century comprise an English or Georgian tradition of georgic', a genre which went out of

⁶⁴ Karen O'Brien, 'Imperial Georgic, 1660-1789', in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. by Gerald Maclean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 160-79. For a counter-argument against the widely-held view that the 'English georgic' endorses agrarian capitalism see Michael Genovese, 'An Organic Commerce: Sociable Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Georgic', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 46.2 (Winter 2013), 197-221.

⁶⁵ John Goodridge, 'Introduction', in John Dyer, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by John Goodridge (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2000), pp. xi-xxii (pp. xvii-xviii).

⁶⁶ Kurt Heinzelman, 'Roman Georgic in the Georgian Age: A Theory of Romantic Genre', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 33.2 (Summer 1991), 182-14 (p. 200).

literary fashion in the last third of that century.⁶⁷ For Heinzelman, however, there is ‘another, eventually silenced and/or forgotten, tradition of Virgilian georgic that has equal historical validity and is often diametrically opposed to the cultural agenda of orthodox georgic’.⁶⁸

Traces of this tradition, Heinzelman claims, are to be found in Romantic poetry and are detectable in the poetry of Wordsworth in particular, even if the poet himself never referred to his own works in this way.⁶⁹ Kevis Goodman is in agreement with this assessment, even though the traces she locates in Romantic poetry – what Heinzelman refers to as georgic ‘entailments’ – differ from his versions.⁷⁰ Both critics may well be overstating the case when it comes to the ‘silenced’ status of the georgic in Wordsworth.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the conception of an alternative version of the georgic, with disruptive elements, proves to be a crucial factor when it comes to its status in the twentieth century and beyond.⁷²

Heinzelman is not alone in distinguishing between ‘English’ and ‘Virgilian’ trends in the georgic tradition. His notion of an unorthodox strain of the georgic that is subsumed into Romantic poetry is consistent with Richard F. Thomas’s identification of a darker ‘Virgilian’

⁶⁷ Heinzelman, pp. 182-83.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 183.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 201-06. For an overview of work done on the georgic in Wordsworth see Goodman, pp. 149-151, n. 32, and in addition see: Annabel Patterson, ‘Wordsworth’s Georgic: Genre and Structure in *The Excursion*’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 9 (1979), 145-54; Anne D. Wallace, ‘Farming on Foot: Tracking Georgic in Clare and Wordsworth’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 34 (1992), 509-40; Goodman, pp. 106-43; J. H. Prynne, *Field Notes: ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and Others* (Cambridge: J. H. Prynne, 2007); and David Fairer, ‘The Pastoral-Georgic Tradition’, in *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. by Andrew Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 111-18.

⁷⁰ Goodman, pp. 10-11, 35-37.

⁷¹ Building on the earlier work of Bruce Graver on this subject, Fairer draws attention to Wordsworth’s attempted translations of Virgil’s *Georgics* in his youth, on top of the fact that he also praised the eighteenth-century ‘living landscape’ of Dyer’s *The Fleece* in a sonnet to the poet, highlighting how the georgic visibly puts the pastoral under pressure in Wordsworth’s poetry: see Fairer, ‘The Pastoral-Georgic Tradition’. See also Bruce Graver, ‘Wordsworth’s Georgic Beginnings’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 33.2 (1991), 137-59, and ‘Wordsworth’s Georgic Pastoral: *Otium* and *Labor* in “Michael”’, *European Romantic Review*, 1.2 (1991), 119-34.

⁷² I am conscious that an oversight of this thesis is the status of the georgic in the Victorian period. For a lively discussion of related themes, however, see Matthew Bevis, ‘Introduction: At Work with Victorian Poetry’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-13. On a relevant note, when the novelist R. D. Blackmore published his translation of the *Georgics* in 1871, he writes in his ‘apology’ of his struggles both in the garden and in garnering a readership (he had published his version of the first two books a decade earlier): ‘Oh, fruitless labour, both of hand and head! | The former struck by frost and tempest-strew’d, | The latter (praised by some, by all eschew’d) | Hath stood a decade, but hath not been read’: see *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by R. D. Blackmore (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1871), pp. 67-68 (p. 67).

tradition in English.⁷³ Thomas's emphasis, however, is not on Wordsworth but a more marginal Romantic figure, the labouring poet John Clare.⁷⁴ For Thomas, Clare sets a precedent for what he refers to as a 'culture of resistance' in the georgic tradition, one that can be traced all the way to Irish-born poets writing in the twentieth century, who, unlike Day Lewis, for the most part stayed in Ireland. In Thomas's formulation, Clare's rural peasant status is related to the identities of Irish 'agricultural poets' such as Patrick Kavanagh and John Montague – though he makes no claim that these poets consciously work in the georgic mode.⁷⁵ He makes a stronger case for the work of Seamus Heaney, and following Sidney Burris in his study of Heaney and pastoral tradition *The Poetry of Resistance* (1990) – which focuses in particular on the influence of Clare on Heaney – Thomas identifies in Heaney's poetry a 'georgics of resistance': 'a georgic realism and a sense and use of agriculture as a grand metaphor for the problems of existence'.⁷⁶

The 'resistance' that Thomas locates in Clare is in opposition to what he calls the 'Augustan Reception' of Virgil, a 'political and social construction' by which his works are interpreted as 'endorsements' of imperial ideology, not only in the context of Octavian himself but also in other movements throughout history: 'French and English imperialism, Russian expansionism, Italian and German nationalism, fascism and Nazism all play a role in the construction.'⁷⁷ In the context of the second World War, as Thomas reveals, the *Georgics* was used to both support and subvert the ideology of German militarism, and this 'may in part reflect the doubtful and troubled circumstances of its composition' – namely, the rise of Octavian.⁷⁸ For Thomas, the ambivalence of Virgil's poem lies in the fact both that it warns

⁷³ Thomas, 'The *Georgics* of Resistance'.

⁷⁴ I return to the question of Clare's georgic credentials in detail in chapter III.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147. See Sidney Burris, *The Poetry of Resistance: Seamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990). I will return to Thomas's claim regarding Heaney and the georgic tradition in detail in chapter II.

⁷⁷ Richard F. Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. xii.

⁷⁸ Thomas, 'The *Georgics* of Resistance', pp. 119-21. Thomas refers to what may be the fact or myth of Joseph Goebbels reading the *Georgics* and interpreting the lines at the end of Book I (quoted above) as a call to arms.

against war (especially, as we have seen, at the end of Book I) and that the language of warfare and weaponry is used in the context of agricultural process. Thomas's own translation in his article of lines 104-06 from Book I describes 'the farmer who hurls the seed then closes in for close combat with the field and dashes down heaps of infertile sand, then leads the river and its streams into the seed territory'.⁷⁹ As Thomas explains, in this passage Virgil borrows from Homer, specifically from a simile describing Achilles battling with the river Scamander.⁸⁰ The example serves to highlight Virgil's use of epic tropes and images in the *Georgics* to capture the idea that the farmer is at war with the forces of the natural world. Virgil problematizes war on the battlefield but also, crucially, in the farmer's field.

Thomas finds in the English tradition of georgic poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a placated version of Virgil's poem in the form of a genre 'visibly based on the *Georgics* (with pastoral blurring)' but without the 'complex hermeneutics and meanings' of the original.⁸¹ This, he writes, 'is the tradition from which Day Lewis emerges, the tradition he helped perpetuate, wittingly or otherwise', in which the English countryside constitutes a denial of the violence enacted there by its inhabitants but also of those acts of war and exploitation enacted in its name elsewhere in the world. Day Lewis's fault, according to Thomas, is to mask such violence and in doing so to simplify the complexity of Virgil's agricultural stance. For Day Lewis, he suggests,

translating in the time of the evacuation of Dunkirk and the fall of France, the countryside, and the idyllic nostalgia it evoked, was a refuge from war, for Virgil it was the site of war, between man and man, nature and man, with victory by either side deeply problematic.⁸²

In Thomas's interpretation, the *Georgics* does not compensate for a fall, whether of France, from Eden, or from a Golden Age, but rather documents the harsh but necessary reality of

His source is an official biography by M. Jungnickel, *Goebbels* (Leipzig: R. Kittler, 1933), p. 39. He also refers to the anti-war interpretations of the classicist Bernard Knox and poet Miklós Radnóti.

⁷⁹ Thomas, 'The *Georgics* of Resistance', p. 141.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 130.

⁸² Ibid., p. 124.

agricultural labour and the violence that is inherent in that kind of work. Day Lewis's version, in his view, participates in burying those elements that are 'non-Augustan', the 'ambivalent' and 'oppositional' aspects of Virgil's original.⁸³

Ziolkowski has also drawn attention to Day Lewis's 'tendency to soften the tone of Virgil's text', especially when it comes to the use of military images in agricultural terminology.⁸⁴ For Ziolkowski, however, Day Lewis's softening of the martial aspects of the *Georgics* highlights a crucial part of its appeal for English poets. He emphasises how 'Virgil composed his poem over a seven-year period (37-30 B.C.) concluding a bloody age of civil strife, mob violence at home, and war abroad.'⁸⁵ The *Georgics*, therefore,

did not constitute an escape from contemporary violence; it amounted to a reflection of that violence in terms of the struggle of farmers with the land, of the agricultural beasts driven by sexual lust, of bees vying for power in their kingdom.⁸⁶

But this is not what Ziolkowski finds in Day Lewis. On the contrary, 'for the English georgicists, in contrast, their preoccupation with the *Georgics* was one step removed from the reality of the present':

For them the rural life represented by the *Georgics* was not, as it was for Virgil, an ambivalent reflection of the harshness of political reality but a refuge from it into a text remote from the present in time, place and language.⁸⁷

By using the term 'English georgicists' Ziolkowski refers to writers in England during the modernist period between the First and the Second World Wars who turned to the *Georgics* for inspiration: Vita Sackville-West in her full-scale georgic imitations *The Land* (1926) and *The Garden* (1946), and translators such as Day Lewis and L. A. S. Jermyn in *The Singing Farmer* (1947), a version of the *Georgics* which, according to Ziolkowski, also constituted a refuge for its author in the circumstances of war.⁸⁸ If Dryden's translation has previously

⁸³ Thomas, *Virgil and the Augustan Reception*, pp. xii-xiv; Thomas, 'The *Georgics* of Resistance', pp. 121-25.

⁸⁴ Ziolkowski, pp. 116-17.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-19. See also Ian Blyth, 'A Sort of English Georgics: Vita Sackville-West's *The Land*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45.1 (2009), 19-31.

exemplified the virtues of georgic poetry as prescribed by Addison, then in Day Lewis's wartime translation once again the subject appears to have appropriately corresponded to style. In his 'Foreword', Day Lewis explains that when it comes to translating the *Georgics* the 'important thing is to steer between the twin vulgarities of flashy colloquialism and perfunctory grandiloquence.'⁸⁹ Following the popularity of Sackville-West's *The Land*, such an alignment of context, style, and subject matter gave Day Lewis's translation instant classic status. So much so, in fact, that in his essay 'Virgil and the Christian World', T. S. Eliot recommends reading Day Lewis's version above any other, even the Latin.⁹⁰

It is against this backdrop of enthusiasm for, and the seeking of refuge in, a specific version of Virgil that Ziolkowski identifies georgic elements in the thought and poetry of Eliot, arguing that when it comes to the *Georgics* in particular Eliot's views are 'very close to those of his British contemporaries.'⁹¹ The 1930s, according to Ziolkowski, marked 'the decade of the *Georgics*' for Eliot, and his exposure to georgic ideas in translations and criticism can be detected in his critical writing and poetry in the following years. As Ziolkowski explains, Eliot's ideas on social reform which he developed during the 1930s bear a strong resemblance to what Eliot refers to in his 1951 essay 'Virgil and the Christian World' as 'the *spirit* of the *Georgics*'. Eliot states:

the attitude towards the soil, and the labour of the soil, which is there expressed, is something that we ought to find particularly intelligible now, when urban agglomeration, the flight from the land, the pillage of the earth and the squandering of natural resources are beginning to attract attention.⁹²

Elsewhere in the essay, Eliot calls the *Georgics* in its original Latin both 'difficult and dull' but he also goes on to stress the importance of its subject – that of *labor* (toil) – and the fact that the work itself was one to which the author devoted 'time, toil and genius.'⁹³

⁸⁹ Day Lewis, 'Foreword', p. 8.

⁹⁰ T. S. Eliot, 'Virgil and the Christian World', *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 121-31 (p. 125).

⁹¹ Ziolkowski, p. 119. See also Gareth Reeves, *T. S. Eliot: A Virgilian Poet* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

⁹² Eliot, 'Virgil and the Christian World', pp. 125-26.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

With the publication of Day Lewis's accessible translation, championed by Eliot, the 'genius' of the *Georgics* became relevant to a modern situation. Yet, as Ziolkowski shows, Eliot's understanding of Virgil's ruralism lacks the 'darker aspects' of its composition.⁹⁴ A Virgilian agrarianism is, for example, evident in the following lines from 'East Coker' (1940), which hark back to the rituals of past inhabitants of rural England:

Keeping time,
 Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
 As in their living in the living seasons
 The time of the seasons and the constellations
 The time of milking and the time of harvest
 The time of the coupling of man and woman
 And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
 Eating and drinking. Dung and death.⁹⁵

Although such imagery is consistent with the *Georgics*, it is more the product of the ideas and ideals of the modern 'English georgicists' than it is of Virgil. Eliot may have acknowledged 'Dung and death' and the growing shadow of war over the English landscape, but his agrarianism is based upon a desire to return to a previous age, one which, as Ziolkowski points out, Eliot had no real desire to get back to by moving to the countryside himself.⁹⁶ In a posthumously published occasional poem 'A Country Walk', Eliot expresses his 'dislike' of cattle: 'to fear a Cow', he writes, is 'Cowardice' to rustics, but, as he admits, 'I'm a timid city child | As all the cattle seem to know'.⁹⁷

The nostalgia of Eliot's conservative vision, and that of the other modern georgic enthusiasts, Day Lewis among them, signifies the tail end of a longer tradition, not only in English, of silencing the more questioning or violent aspects of Virgil's *Georgics*. Identifying

⁹⁴ Ziolkowski, p. 127.

⁹⁵ T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker', *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, ed. by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 2 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), I: *Collected and Uncollected Poems*, pp. 185-92 (p. 186).

⁹⁶ Ziolkowski, p. 126.

⁹⁷ T. S. Eliot, 'A Country Walk', *Poems*, ed. by Ricks and McCue, 2 vols, I, pp. 296-97. For Empson, who 'was brought up to believe that a good man simply could not be afraid of cows', 'it's very sensible to be afraid of the sundering herds'; 'the way to handle cows', he adds, 'is to refuse to let them know you're afraid of them'. For Empson, the point is one of literary criticism: 'I feel this when I see people writing down what I meant in poems. I feel that again and again. How could you have supposed I was wrestling with a fear of cows?': see Christopher Norris and David B. Wilson, 'An Interview with William Empson', in *Some Versions of Empson*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 289-319 (pp. 294-95).

Day Lewis and Eliot as part of such a lineage, as Thomas does, is extreme, even if Eliot did at one point say he was ‘all for Empires’.⁹⁸ As this introduction has explained, the georgic provided 1930s writers with a way of negotiating the political circumstances of their time without denying the reality of their powerlessness as writers to change the course of history. This thesis makes the argument that the writing of Hughes, Heaney, and Oswald constitutes – knowingly and unknowingly – both a continuation and a revival of what Heinzelman, Thomas, and Ziolkowski collectively conceive of as a Virgilian ‘georgics of resistance’, in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If the georgic is relevant to our contemporary situation, then it is as part of a tradition that has its roots in the oppositional stance and ambivalence of Virgil’s poem itself. Rather than claiming Hughes, Heaney, and Oswald were all directly influenced by Virgil, this thesis uses the georgic as a critical lens to examine complex aspects of their work that have so far been neglected.

Georgic for Our Time

In 1974, John Barrell and John Bull proclaimed that with the rise of the ‘Factory-Farm’ and an increasing lack of a distinction between urban and rural industrial landscapes, the term pastoral was now ‘almost devoid of any meaning’:

Indeed, with the current concern with ecology, it is difficult to anticipate a revival of interest in the Pastoral – industrial man looking away from his technological wasteland to an older and better world [...] For today, more than ever before, the pastoral vision simply will not do.⁹⁹

Barrell and Bull’s assessment follows Raymond Williams’s wide-ranging critique of the pastoral in critical discourse in *The Country and City*, published a year previously. Williams

⁹⁸ Cited in Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1975; repr, 1983), p. 15. Original quotation from the *Transatlantic Review* (January 1924).

⁹⁹ *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, ed. by John Barrell and John Bull (London: Allen Lane, 1974), p. 432.

begins his extended argument by seeking to complicate the persistence of nostalgia in the pastoral mode throughout literary history in English; he concludes by looking to the future:

One of the real merits of some rural writers, often not seen because other elements are present, is an insistence on the complexity of the living natural environment. Now that the dangers to this environment have come more clearly into view, our ideas, once again, have to shift [...] We have more to work with than we ordinarily acknowledge. Rural England is said to be a thing of the past, and of course the changes are evident. But if we look up from the idea and back at the country we see how much is still present, even in this exceptionally industrialised and urbanised nation.¹⁰⁰

Williams may feel more optimistic than Barrell and Bull about the survival of a distinction between country and city in the late-twentieth century. Nonetheless, he demonstrates a similar resignation that the pastoral in its present form is not sufficient as a term for the challenges faced by writers and their critics in an era of environmental crisis. For Williams, those ‘other elements’ of rural texts, such as an inherited pastoral nostalgia, work to mask their environmental credentials, just as for Barrell and Bull the ‘current concern with ecology’ is not compatible with the pastoral vision.¹⁰¹

Since Williams announced the demise of the pastoral there has been an ongoing debate about the terminology surrounding poetry and the natural world. Terry Gifford, in his 1999 critical survey *Pastoral*, does not deny that thanks to Barrell and Bull and Williams in particular the pastoral has become for many a pejorative term.¹⁰² Nonetheless, for critics such as Gifford, different ‘kinds’ of pastoral have the capacity to say something constructive in the context of ecological crisis. Gifford coins the term ‘post-pastoral’ to describe a literature possessing both pastoral and ‘antipastoral’ qualities which ‘addresses the problems of human accommodation in nature’.¹⁰³ Greg Garrard, meanwhile, in his introduction to *Ecocriticism* (2012), dedicates a chapter to the pastoral and puts forward the argument that ‘one

¹⁰⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (1973) (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 300.

¹⁰¹ The georgic fares little better than the pastoral in these accounts. Williams’s analysis of the English georgic is centred on a critique of James Thomson’s *The Seasons: The Country and the City* (pp. 68-72). Barrell and Bull also focus their largely critical discussion on Thomson: see *English Pastoral Verse*, pp. 297-99.

¹⁰² Gifford, *Pastoral*, pp. 1-12.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-74. Gifford uses the poetry of both Hughes and Heaney as examples of the post-pastoral. I explore the differences between the georgic and antipastoral in more detail in chapter 2.

contemporary pastoral refuge lies within the discourse of ecology itself', though later he contradicts this by suggesting that the mode's 'liability of anachronism' makes it unsuitable for application to contemporary concerns.¹⁰⁴ More recently, Gifford has provided an extensive account of ecocriticism's treatment of the pastoral on both sides of the Atlantic, showing how in the United States the pastoral was given an 'American distinctiveness' which provided 'a sense of continuity that could be claimed by emerging ecocriticism as an essential frame for reading texts that explored the meanings of nature, wilderness, nation and even postmodernity itself.'¹⁰⁵

The pastoral's complicated and somewhat contradictory afterlife in environmental criticism is indicative of the ways in which classical categories of poetry have been adapted to suit modern-day circumstances and concerns. Gifford recalls how in the mid-1990s the term 'nature poetry' carried a similar association to that of the pastoral and was in need of reassessment or reinvention. Writing in 2011, he recalls:

I knew that nature poetry had become a pejorative designation and I was looking for a term for the new environmentally self-aware poetry [...] Actually, I thought that "green poetry" would come to be the established term, being more broadly inclusive than what I thought of as a narrower range of scientifically informed, and possibly didactic, ecological poetry or "ecopoetry". I was wrong, and the reverse has come to be the case. "Ecopoetry" is now broadly used for what used to be called nature poetry.¹⁰⁶

The change in terminology is more profound than even Gifford acknowledges. As Sam Solnick has documented, ecopoetry is now the term used to describe most 'innovative' as well as 'mainstream' poetry (and everything in between) concerned with the environment.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Garrard, p. 63. Garrard also dedicates a significant portion of his chapter on 'Dwelling' to the georgic mode, arguing for its relevance to contemporary literature (pp. 117-29). However, reading the georgic in the context of Martin Heidegger's philosophy of 'dwelling', Garrard warns that 'it is significant that environmentally oriented georgic ideology should have been so easily appropriated' by the Nazis (p. 122). I return to Heidegger's significance for the contemporary georgic in chapter V (pp. 215-17).

¹⁰⁵ Terry Gifford, 'The Environmental Humanities and the Pastoral Tradition', in *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, ed. by Christopher Schliephake (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 159-74 (p. 160). See also Gifford's chapter 'Post-pastoral as a Tool for Ecocriticism', in *Pastoral and the Humanities*, ed. by Skoie and Velázquez, pp. 14-24.

¹⁰⁶ Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, 2nd edn (Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2011), pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁷ Sam Solnick, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology, and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 19-37.

Unlike 'nature poetry', the pastoral as a category has survived the rise of ecopoetry in part by allowing itself to be subsumed by this new term, all the while remaining distinct from it in terms of origin, convention, and tradition. With the rise and fall of such terminology, gaps in critical discourse inevitably appear. One such gap is Gifford's identification of a narrow, scientific, and didactic ecological poetry; another is the poetry of agriculture. It is in this new critical climate that the georgic is making a comeback.

It is significant that in the United States, where, as Gifford observes, the pastoral remains an 'essential frame' in the context of ecocriticism, there has nonetheless been a growing sense of dissatisfaction with both pastoral and ecocritical approaches, especially when it comes to the representation of agricultural themes, peoples, and environments. In his 2011 study of the new agrarianism, *Grounded Vision*, William H. Major observes:

Although ecocriticism has grown in stature since 1990, one of the more striking aspects about this burgeoning area of study is just how little attention it has paid to the contributions rural peoples have made to the environmental ethos.¹⁰⁸

For Major, those who see the anthropogenic as purely 'a force of destruction' in effect silence those who actually live and work on the land, the farmers and other rural inhabitants who 'arguably have as much or more at stake than the rest of us in the promotion of a healthy environment'.¹⁰⁹ To address this imbalance in critical perceptions, Major refers to the work of William Conlogue in *Working the Garden* (2001) and Timothy Sweet in *American Georgics* (2002), suggesting that one of the ways in which rural voices and agrarian values might be brought into the language of the academy is through the use of the georgic as an environmentally sensitive critical approach.¹¹⁰ Major is not the only one who has turned to the georgic in order to address the shortcomings of other received approaches. In *Green*

¹⁰⁸ William H. Major, *Grounded Vision: New Agrarianism and the Academy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ Major, pp. 35-36.

¹¹⁰ See William Conlogue, *Working the Garden: American Writers and the Industrialization of Agriculture* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), and Timothy Sweet, *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in American Literature, 1580-1864* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

Modernism (2015), Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy expresses his reservations about ecocriticism, arguing that ‘it threatens to confuse critical practices by the very breadth of its application’.¹¹¹ Although the georgic is not a central thread in his argument, he writes of environmental criticism ‘reawakening to the georgic’: ‘ecocriticism has a long and worthy affection for the pastoral,’ he states, ‘but has largely overlooked the georgic.’¹¹² McCarthy puts this down to the mode’s ‘rhetoric of mastering and exploiting nature in contrast to the ideal of pastoral innocence’.¹¹³ This is a formulation, however, that he then flips on its head: the georgic, he writes, ‘offers a tradition of social protest, where pastoral’s story is one of aristocratic cooperation’.¹¹⁴ In associating social protest with environmental critique, McCarthy’s environmental georgic displayed affinities with Thomas’s ‘georgics of resistance’.

Additionally, Ethan Mannon, in a recent article on Robert Frost, proposes that critics who ‘attempt to re-brand the pastoral mode as “radical” or “sustainable” could usefully shift their attention to the georgic mode,’ adding that ‘georgic literature speaks directly to resource conservation and sustainability.’¹¹⁵

As Mannon writes, paying more attention to the georgic aspects of Frost’s verse, for example, would add to the ‘renaissance’ of georgic criticism in the United States, but it is time that a similar investigation was undertaken on poetry in Britain and Ireland and that the benefits of such a georgic ‘renaissance’ were felt on both sides of the Atlantic.¹¹⁶ It is remarkable that it has taken two American critics, Ziolkowski and McCarthy, to bring the georgic to bear on British modernism. However, there are ways of reconciling previous

¹¹¹ Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900-1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 27.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 178.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Ethan Mannon, ‘Georgic Environmentalism in *North of Boston*: An Ethic for Economic Landscapes’, *ISLE*, 23.2 (Spring 2016), 344-69 (p. 348).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 358, n. 32. There are good reasons why there has been a disparity with regard to attention on the georgic and issues of environmentalism in literature in the United States and British Isles. The georgic still has strong associations, in England especially, with the trend for formal ‘Georgian’ georgic poems in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and given those poems’ own associations with industry and nation building it is understandable why the term has not yet been taken up in critical discourse in relation to recent poetry in Ireland, for instance (I will examine this issue further in chapter III).

versions of the georgic with the environmental concerns of poets and critics writing today. Significantly, David Fairer has coined the term ‘eco-georgic’ in an attempt to reclaim the British eighteenth-century georgic poem as an environmentally sensitive form. Like Major and McCarthy, Fairer draws attention to ecocriticism’s neglect of georgic values and how these have tended to be viewed as ‘peripheral, even antagonistic, to “green” principles’.¹¹⁷

This he puts down to the pastoral bias in ecocritical discourse:

The spiritual dynamic of Romantic ecocriticism, founded on pastoral ideals, remains inspirational; but georgic’s grappling with the possible death of Nature and the breakdown of its infinitely various life-sustaining systems, has something to contribute too. It is surely invidious to use ecological criticism to fight merely literary battles.¹¹⁸

The implication in Fairer’s diagnosis is that if environmental criticism is to fulfil its promises and raise an awareness of ecological crisis then this must happen to some degree off the page and outside the academy. As he puts it, ‘practical realities and negative pressures have to be negotiated in any truly committed ecology.’¹¹⁹ This thesis is not intended solely as a literary battle – pastoral vs. georgic – but rather it offers a way of opening up current debates surrounding literature and the countryside to include the voices of those who live and work on the land, as well as those of literary critics and environmental experts.

In her assessment of the eighteenth-century labouring-class poet Stephen Duck’s georgic credentials, Keegan identifies some of the more off-putting aspects of the georgic in the English tradition, and contemplates why such poems might not appeal to twenty-first century readers and critics. Building upon Heinzelman’s assertion that the ‘referentiality’ of the georgic, its fidelity to historical authenticity, is a ‘literary liability’, Keegan writes:

For readers today, studying eighteenth-century georgics can be a tedious endeavor. It is difficult to see the literary value of poems about cider production, or to be moved by a poet’s skill in describing hoof rot prevention in sheep. Such topics seem better suited to the cultural historian or the anthropologist. Their worth becomes even more

¹¹⁷ Fairer, ‘The World of Eco-Georgic’, p. 202.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 214. Fairer highlights the absence of the georgic in key theoretical approaches to ecocriticism, with a particular emphasis on the work of Timothy Morton (p. 207). See Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA.; London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

dubious when they are written by authors whose social and educational pedigrees are suspect.¹²⁰

Keegan goes on to make a convincing case for Duck's own complexities as a reader and writer of georgic poetry, suggesting in the process that the above is not necessarily her own view. Her point, rather, is that agricultural details may have been relevant, or even vital, to a society in which agriculture accounted for a large part of the nation's economy and workforce, let alone its cultural currency; whereas today issues such as hoof rot in sheep are far removed from the daily life of the average reader and are of ever-diminishing relevance to society and culture as a whole.

In the poetry of Hughes, Heaney, and Oswald, the georgic works against this trend of diminishing relevance and emphasises how traditional (as well as certain modern) agricultural methods and perspectives are important to contemporary culture – if not as practical lessons, then as metaphors for our relationship with the environment at large. Keegan may question the degree to which a modern reader can invest in the hoof care of sheep, but in the work of these poets, it is exactly their accounts of animal husbandry and hands-on practical experience of the land that makes their poetry some of the most important, highly regarded, and widely read of the last fifty years. A Hughes poem with a title such as 'Hoof Trimming', for example, may well prompt negative associations as those by suggested by Keegan, but a closer examination of the poem (as will be provided in chapter I) shows that Hughes was able to combine his best poetry with what is very much a farmer's account of a routine livestock operation.

There is another facet to Keegan's critique of eighteenth-century georgic poetry that is worth addressing in light of what this investigation identifies as the survival of the georgic in contemporary poetry. Keegan claims that the subject matter of agricultural life might be better suited to cultural historians and anthropologists than literary critics. Granted, she

¹²⁰ Keegan, p. 550. See also Heinzelman, p. 192.

communicates this idea in order to provide a contrast to her own view that georgic elements are worth paying attention to, but such a statement is useful as a foil to this thesis's exploration of the ways in which agriculture remains an important subject for poets. In a recent study, Sean Heuston advocates the legitimacy of an ethnographic approach to modern poetry, specifically in relation to W. B. Yeats, Robert Frost, Robert Penn Warren, and, significantly for this thesis, Seamus Heaney.¹²¹ Hughes and Oswald would not look out of place among these writers. Indeed, Heuston's attempt to reshape the field with regard to poetry and anthropology provides a foundation upon which it is possible to make similar arguments concerning their poetry, especially after the fact that Thomas has shown how the ethnographical is a fundamental aspect of Virgil's *Georgics* itself.¹²²

As the American farmer, poet and essayist Wendell Berry warns, we forget that farming and poetry are connected at our peril: 'the word *agriculture*, after all, does not mean "agriscience," much less "agribusiness"'.¹²³ Berry adds that 'if we corrupt agriculture we corrupt culture'.¹²⁴ In a recent article in *The Guardian*, it was revealed that nearly every single county in England now has at least one industrial-scale livestock farm, with the total number of such 'mega farms' at around 800 across the UK.¹²⁵ The county of Herefordshire alone, the article claims, 'has more than 16 million factory-farmed animals, mainly poultry – which means the county has 88 times more factory-farmed animals than it does humans.'¹²⁶

¹²¹ Sean Heuston, *Modern Poetry and Ethnography: Yeats, Frost, Warren, Heaney and the Poet as Anthropologist* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹²² See Richard F. Thomas, *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: The Ethnographical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1982), pp. 35-92. Whereas Heuston's use of the terms ethnography and anthropology are, as he puts it, 'less metaphorical' (p. 10), I propose an interpretation that embraces these terms in a way that is *more* metaphorical, and, staying mindful of Hughes's interest in anthropology in particular, finds a connection between the two different types of 'field work'.

¹²³ Wendell Berry, 'The Use of Energy', in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), pp. 279-92 (pp. 285).

¹²⁴ Berry, 'The Use of Energy', pp. 288.

¹²⁵ Andrew Wasley, Fiona Harvey, Madlen Davies, and David Child, 'The UK has nearly 800 livestock mega farms, investigation reveals', *Guardian*, 17 July 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/17/uk-has-nearly-800-livestock-mega-farms-investigation-reveals>> [accessed 17 July 2017]. The article explains that, despite there being no legal definition in the UK of a 'mega farm', 'in the US concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are defined as those housing 125,000 broiler chickens, 82,000 laying hens, 2,500 pigs or 700 dairy or 1,000 beef cattle'.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Traditionally, Herefordshire was perceived not as a place of agribusiness but of agriculture. In his study of the rural poor in the landscape tradition of the long-eighteenth century, John Barrell writes how the particular characteristics of the county made Herefordshire ‘the home of the English georgic’ and how it was often ‘presented as a pastoral-georgic haven in a newly industrialised Britain.’¹²⁷ If georgic poetry is indeed, as this thesis asserts, the poetry of *agriculture*, then how can it speak for a countryside dominated by agribusiness? What insights can now be offered by Virgil’s poetry with regard to the current state of countryside? Day Lewis’s translation was intended as a valediction for the old ways of agriculture in early-twentieth century Devon; but is such a valediction for Devon, for Herefordshire, or any other county or country, for that matter, still possible, even desirable? Does the georgic still work now that agribusiness prevails and agriculture is in decline? According to Donna Landry, ‘if rural communities are to be preserved as well as ancient monuments, then a georgic rather than a pastoral sense of what it means to inhabit that modern invention, the countryside, will remain necessary.’¹²⁸ This thesis is an answer to Landry’s call in the context of contemporary poetry, yet it does this while questioning the notion that the purpose of the georgic is merely to ‘preserve’. The activities of my chosen writers, both on the page and in the fields, represent what constitutes a process of counter-cultural georgic survival. The poetry of Hughes, Heaney and Oswald, it will be argued, has an implicit political dimension in that it opposes the philosophy and the reality of agribusiness by offering alternative perspectives on the countryside.

Upon the publication of Frost’s *North of Boston* (1915), Ezra Pound referred to the poems as ‘modern georgics’, stating: ‘I know more of farm life than I did before I had read his poems. This means I know more of “Life.”’¹²⁹ As the chapters that follow testify, an education in agriculture can also be an education in poetry. This study’s analysis of the

¹²⁷ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 173-74, n. 99.

¹²⁸ Landry, p. 243.

¹²⁹ Ezra Pound, ‘Modern Georgics’, *Poetry*, 3.3 (December 1914), 127-30 (p. 128).

agricultural content of poems is matched by its attention to the use of language, form and versification. For Hughes, Heaney and Oswald, poetry is like farming in that it is another form of hard work, ‘a way of happening’. Paying heed to what Gaston Bachelard has defined as the ‘material imagination’ – both the way the material world is imagined and the materiality of imagining – *The Farming of Verse* documents these poets’ efforts to narrow the imaginative and temporal distance between their experiences of working with matter and their recordings of these experiences in poems.¹³⁰ Remaining sensitive to the literary qualities of the results of these efforts, it examines the extent to which georgic poetry is rooted in the location of labour by charting how regional factors such as climate and soil-type influence metre as well as materials.

Hughes, Heaney, and Oswald are not the only writers to have engaged with Virgil’s *Georgics*, or with agriculture in general, over the last fifty years. This study could have included the work of Patrick Kavanagh, John Montague, Peter Fallon in Ireland and Northern Ireland, or just as easily R. S. Thomas, Gillian Clarke, Norman MacCaig, and Katrina Porteous in Wales, Scotland, and England respectively.¹³¹ The poets under consideration, however, speak to one another – forwards as well as backwards across the years. Moreover, their work demonstrates a particular treatment of the subject: as will be argued in the chapters that follow, the agricultural and horticultural aspects of their poetry are georgic in a subtle sense, but are no less significant for being so.

Ted Hughes: Poet and Farmer

During his laureateship, Ted Hughes drafted a speech for a rural audience, the notes of which survive in the archives at the British Library. In these notes, Hughes introduces himself as a

¹³⁰ See Bachelard.

¹³¹ Other significant figures are treated in the conclusion.

farmer as well as a poet: ‘I see I’m billed on your programme as the Poet Laureate,’ he observes, ‘I’m not billed as an ex-farm labourer. But in fact I am an ex-farm labourer [...] I’m not billed as an ex-farmer either. Or even as a sort of farmer. I am an ex-farmer.’¹³² He goes on to raise the question of what a Poet Laureate could say that would be of interest to farmers. Judging by the rest of the notes for this speech, the answer is a great deal. The important question from a literary-critical standpoint is what impact did Ted Hughes the farmer have on the work of Ted Hughes the poet? Or, to put it another way, what does Hughes’s poetry say about the relationship between culture and agriculture in the late-twentieth century and beyond?

Hughes’s dual role as poet and farmer turns out to be crucial to an understanding of his literary output as a whole, not to mention the wider issues at stake when it comes to contemporary poetry and representations of the countryside at large. Yet he was not always so eager to identify himself with farmers. ‘I drown in the drumming ploughland’, begins the first poem of Hughes’s first collection *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957).¹³³ In an early autobiographical prose piece ‘The Rock’, he writes that it was during his regular ascents to the moors and descents back into the town as a boy in the Calder Valley that ‘the division of the body and soul began.’¹³⁴ However, town and moor, wild and tame, were not simply separated by a line but mediated by stretches of farmland, which grew wilder and wilder the

¹³² Ted Hughes, ‘Season Songs, 18 Aug 1974-1979’, 1 Folder, London, British Library, Edward James Hughes Papers, ADD. Ms. 88918/1/55. In a letter to the author, Carol Hughes and the Ted Hughes Estate confirm that these notes were probably for a speech delivered on prize-giving day at Bicton College (which specialises in agricultural courses) at some point in the late 1980s: Carol Hughes, Letter to Jack Thacker, 17 February 2017.

¹³³ Ted Hughes, ‘The Hawk in the Rain’, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Paul Keegan (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 19. All references to Hughes’s poems, unless otherwise stated, are taken from this edition, hereafter *CP*; references will occur within parenthesis in the text.

¹³⁴ Ted Hughes, ‘The Rock’, *Listener*, 1779 (19 September 1963), 421-23 (p. 422). Connecting Hughes’ early exposure to wild animals in the Calder Valley and his father Edward Hughes’s experiences of the First World War, Laura Webb argues that it is in ‘the combination of these converging influences, the organic survival and vitality of natural, animal world, and the uncompromising pessimism and inconsolable loss of the human, war-torn world, that Hughes’s poetic themes were formed’: see Laura Webb, ‘Mythology, Mortality, and Memorialization: Animal and Human Endurance in Hughes’ Poetry’, in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Mark Wormald, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 33-47 (p. 34). For more on Hughes’s exposure to farming in West Yorkshire and how the Calder Valley landscape informs his poems see Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2015), pp. 38-40, and Steve Ely, *Ted Hughes’s South Yorkshire: Made in Mexborough* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 21-26.

further up he climbed.¹³⁵ Despite a family connection to farmers, there is often the sense in early Hughes that the speakers of the poems identify more with wild nature than with the rooted and the domesticated, and that they would rather be up on the moors or hovering above the landscape at eye level with the hawk than working the land below.

This was soon to change. In Hughes's life as well as in his poetry, as chapters I and II document, an enthusiasm for farming took hold and tightened its grip.¹³⁶ In 1972, the poet fulfilled a long-held ambition and bought a farm in Devon, which he managed with his wife Carol Hughes and father-in-law Jack Orchard. Even after this he would come to complain that 'Writing & farming mix like motor engines & gelignite' (*LTH*, p. 341). The story of Hughes and agriculture is one in which what is at first a diluted interest becomes a fully concentrated passion, with dramatic and at times controversial results in the form of highly charged poems and fiery political statements. Furthermore, its importance for literary studies goes beyond the facts of biography and to the heart of such wider questions surrounding genre and mode, politics and aesthetics, animal rights and environmentalism. Hughes may have thought at one stage that farming and writing were incompatible, but when they collided in his work they always produced a spark. In fact, Hughes's passion for agriculture helped him to discover a new intensity in his writing: as Neil Roberts has pointed out, the period when Hughes was farming (1972-76) was also his most prolific as a poet, and his agricultural poems of the mid-1970s rank highly among his many literary achievements.¹³⁷

Many of Hughes's works from the 1970s onwards are informed by his agricultural experiences. *Season Songs* (1976) was written during the period when Hughes was farming

¹³⁵ Hughes, 'The Rock', p. 422.

¹³⁶ Hughes would repeatedly write to his brother Gerald Hughes over a period of many years in the hope that they would eventually run a farm together in England, Wales, or Ireland. Among his many schemes – after he had undertaken extensive research on the subject – was a plan to run a mink farm, as well as the more conventional pursuits of dairy farming and mixed farming in Devon and Yorkshire: see *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2007; repr. 2009), pp. 26-27, 47, 96, 220-221. All further references to the letters will be from this edition, hereafter *LTH*; references will occur within parenthesis in the text. The realisation that his brother was unwilling to join him and 'the emptiness of that dream' in 1974 was, as he put it, 'a big station in [his] life's journey' (*LTH*, p. 358). See also Gerald Hughes, *Ted and I* (London: The Robson Press, 2012), pp. 147-148.

¹³⁷ Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 121.

and the collection taps into the seasonal changes and cyclical life of the farm. There are significant agricultural elements in *Gaudete* (1977), as well as in the West Yorkshire represented by *Remains of Elmet* (1979) and the fishing sequences of *River* (1983). Farming is also at the heart of Hughes's works for children, especially *What is the Truth? A Farmyard Fable for the Young* (1983).¹³⁸ By far the most direct engagement with agriculture in his body of work, however, is the sequence of poems based on his time spent at Moortown Farm.¹³⁹ The poems were first published as a Rainbow Press special edition *Moortown Elegies* in 1978, appearing shortly afterwards as the title sequence of *Moortown* in 1979. A decade later they were published yet again, this time as the collection *Moortown Diary* (1989), with added dates of composition, a preface, as well as explanatory notes added by Hughes.¹⁴⁰

Jack Orchard died in 1976, and Moortown farm's livestock was sold off later that year.¹⁴¹ The original special edition title of the collection *Moortown Elegies* emphasises the poems' elegiac qualities. When they appeared a year later in *Moortown* they were accompanied by a dedication to Orchard, and in the 1989 'Preface' to *Moortown Diary* Hughes writes about how he put them together for his wife as 'a memorial to her father' (*CP*, p. 1205). The final poems of the sequence pay tribute to Orchard and in light of this some critics have read the sequence as a whole in the context of pastoral elegy.¹⁴² Others have argued, however, that even in the earlier editions 'the tone of the collection is not principally elegiac'.¹⁴³ The significance of Hughes's Moortown poems arises in part out of this problem of categorisation: in one sense, they hold value in the context of such literary traditions as the

¹³⁸ For an in-depth examination of *What is the Truth?* see David Whitley, "'The Fox is a jolly farmer and we farm the same land': Ted Hughes and Farming", in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Wormald, Roberts, and Gifford, pp. 96-111, (pp. 105-10).

¹³⁹ Moortown Farm was farmed in conjunction with 17 acres in North Tawton, known as Mannings Fields. The poems 'February 17th' and 'Birth of Rainbow', which are referenced elsewhere in the chapter, describe events that took place on Mannings Fields.

¹⁴⁰ Due to the importance of the added prose to the 1989 edition, I will be referring primarily to the sequence as *Moortown Diary* from this point onwards.

¹⁴¹ Carol Hughes continued to manage the farm until 1997, having annual grass sales that Hughes would attend.

¹⁴² See Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 61-68, and Edward Hadley, *The Elegies of Ted Hughes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 71-81.

¹⁴³ Craig Robinson, 'The Good Shepherd: *Moortown Elegies*', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 257-84 (p. 257).

pastoral; in another they hold a different kind of value as authentic documents of a distinct way of life.

The significance of the interaction between poet and farmer in the Moortown poems has preoccupied critics almost from the moment they were published. In 1981, Gifford and Roberts made the case that when reading Hughes's poems about agriculture 'our admiration of the poet's capacity to act leads to our admiration of the uniquely human engagement in the creative-destructive processes of nature that farmers undertake in their daily work'.¹⁴⁴ For Gifford and Roberts, the poet's practical experience and his authentic representation of such experiences are factors in the assessment of the writing – the implication being that Hughes's farming poems are a reflection on the farmer as much as the poet. For Craig Robinson, writing in 1983, the question of authenticity is important with respect not only to the literary quality of the poems but also to how the poems shine a light on conditions in the countryside. For Robinson, Hughes's rural verse 'is not only set over against an increasingly dominant urbanisation, but also against the drift of contemporary farming, which is moving away from the paradigm he offers'.¹⁴⁵ As such, the importance of Hughes's dual identity as poet and farmer goes both ways: the farming informs the poems and the poems reflect on agriculture more widely. For Hughes, agricultural issues had political and environmental as well as literary aspects. Consequently, his poetry provides a unique opportunity to reassess the cultural conditions of agriculture at the time he was writing since they are written from the perspective of a literary figure who made it his business to be involved.

David Whitley has recently explored the more problematic aspects of the agricultural/aesthetic dynamic in Hughes's work. Whitley points out that Hughes realised early on that 'his passionate interest in farming could easily divert the energies he needed for his literary ambitions to be achieved' while not forgetting that 'a close connection with

¹⁴⁴ Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 251.

¹⁴⁵ Robinson, 'The Good Shepherd', p. 263.

farming was vitally important to Hughes'.¹⁴⁶ The contradictions do not end with Hughes. According to Whitley, the image 'we have of farming is mundane and familiar [...] yet few of us now have any detailed sense of what actually happens on farms. It is an area closed off from our experience'.¹⁴⁷ Whitley's observations raise an important issue regarding the value of the poems as documents of farming life: does it matter that readers may not share Hughes's enthusiasm for agriculture? As David Sergeant has observed, Hughes's poems are rare in that they hold as much value for the rural expert as they do for readers of poetry, and that the 'authoritative rightness possessed by the poems in *Moortown Diary* forms a large part of their appeal'.¹⁴⁸ Yet, as Sergeant points out, even a farmer's appreciation of the poems may have just as much to do with their literary qualities as with their rural subject matter, suggesting that the polarity between aesthetics and authenticity is a mistake.¹⁴⁹

Gathering together these critics' efforts to reconcile the literary elements in the poems with their more down-to-earth aspects shows how any polarisation between the rural and the literary is redundant in Hughes's work. What is needed in order to fully appreciate the farming poems, rather, is a critical register that is able to accommodate both Hughes's agricultural sensibility as well as his writerly urbanity.¹⁵⁰ Recent readings of Hughes's farming poetry by Edward Hadley and Iain Twiddy are sensitive to alternative traditions in which the poems can be interpreted. Following in the footsteps of W. J. Keith's study of non-fiction prose, Hadley reads Hughes's *Remains of Elmet* in the context of a 'rural tradition' of

¹⁴⁶ Whitley, p. 96.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁴⁸ David Sergeant, 'Moortown/Moortown Diary', *The Ted Hughes Society* <<http://thetedsociety.org/moortown>> [accessed 11 April 2016].

¹⁴⁹ As Sergeant recounts in an anecdote, when he showed his own copy of *Moortown Diary* to a farmer in Australia, they responded positively with the remark 'yes: seems about right', before also commenting on that fact that the poems were 'beautiful' (Sergeant).

¹⁵⁰ The keynote lecture given at the most recent Ted Hughes International Conference at the University of Sheffield, September 2016, was delivered by Seamus Perry, who spoke on the subject of 'Hughes's Urbanity'. Surprisingly, Perry's focus for the talk was *Moortown Diary*, his assertion being that when Hughes chooses to employ a word such as 'insofar' in the poem 'Ravens', for instance ('Though this one was lucky insofar | As it made the attempt into a warm wind | and its first day of death was blue and warm') – he is at once betraying his own urbanity as a farmer/poet and adjusting his language so as to accommodate a more urbane readership (CP, p. 518). In other words, Hughes's farming poetry was not just written for farmers but literary readers: Seamus Perry, 'Hughes's Urbanity', paper delivered at *Ted Hughes: Dreams as Deep as England* conference, University of Sheffield, 11 September 2015.

poetry, while acknowledging that this collection ‘anticipates Hughes’s concerns in *Moortown Elegies*’.¹⁵¹ Twiddy, meanwhile, citing an earlier comment by Thomas West, argues:

the pastoral vision is limited. Hughes’s collection, where the representation of agricultural existence is neither unconditionally natural (completely separate from human concerns), nor exclusively yoked to human relevance or artificially congenial, this shares some common ground with the *Georgics*, along with their didacticism.¹⁵²

From pastoral to rural to georgic: as Hadley and Twiddy demonstrate, the sequence does not confine itself to a single categorisation or tradition, and there has been an increasing trend to read the poems, as Twiddy does, alongside Virgil’s *Georgics*.¹⁵³ The georgic mode – as both a corrective to and a subcategory of the pastoral – offers a model by which critics have been able to accommodate the inherent contradictions in Hughes’s poems and which underlie the experience of farming more generally. Such comments on the georgic qualities in Hughes’s work are as valuable as they are suggestive, but there has not yet been an in-depth assessment of the georgic elements in Hughes’s poetry.

Hughes may not have made the georgic connection himself, and the notion that he directly imitated Virgil remains unlikely. However, as is evident from assessments of Hughes’s critics, this does not preclude an interpretation of the poems in such a context. In a posthumously published essay entitled ‘Suffering and Decision’, Hughes’s friend and fellow poet Seamus Heaney makes the claim that *Moortown* ‘could be read as a local variation of the theme of Virgil’s *Georgics*, insofar as it is his act of thanksgiving for the fulfilments he experienced in his middle and late years when he was integrated into the life and land of

¹⁵¹ Hadley, pp. 54, 66. See also W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975).

¹⁵² Twiddy, p. 64. Thomas West writes that Hughes’s poems are ‘too naturalistic to be pastorals’ but goes on to say that they are ‘occasionally georgic in so far as they show the ways and instruct in the techniques of country life’: see Thomas West, *Ted Hughes* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1985), p. 104.

¹⁵³ Gifford, for example, puts the balancing of knowledge and compassion in the volume down to its ‘georgic quality of detail’: see Terry Gifford, *Ted Hughes* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 53. In a similar vein, Whitley attributes the collection’s doggedly optimistic tone to ‘the georgic element in the pastoral tradition’ (Whitley, p. 97). Yvonne Reddick, in a recent assessment, remarks: ‘Hughes’s *Moortown* poems do not necessarily seek to repudiate an earlier poetic mode; instead, they follow in a long tradition of poetic engagement with rural work. In this respect, Hughes’s farming poetry is more georgic than anti-pastoral’. She adds that ‘Hughes’s elegies for Jack Orchard create georgic laments in the Virgilian tradition’: see Yvonne Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 191.

Devon'.¹⁵⁴ Although this claim is not Hughes's, no one would have understood better than Heaney – who had already developed an intimate friendship with Hughes by the time he had bought Moortown farm – what the venture would have meant in terms of Hughes's life and writing.¹⁵⁵

Chapters I and II examine the dynamic between writing and farming in Hughes's work through the critical lens of the georgic, with a specific focus on *Moortown Diary*. They argue that Hughes's poetry is georgic precisely because it does not shy away from the more problematic aspects of farming, and of writing about farming. If *Moortown Diary* is where the literary and the agricultural collide in Hughes's work, then this has implications for a revival of the georgic in modern poetry. It also has wider resonances when it comes to representations of the countryside in the late-twentieth century. In the case of Hughes, his poetry is set against the backdrop of economic decline in agriculture and the relationship between conditions on the ground and in Hughes's poetry forms the focus of chapter II, which looks in detail at the poet's attempts to document a fast vanishing way of life. Hughes's poems resist the slow creep of agribusiness by remaining close to his subjects: the animals – both wild and tame – that are his responsibility as a farmer. Over the course of both chapters, the argument is made that Hughes's farming poetry is a vital part of his environmentalism, influencing his campaigns for a cleaner countryside, as well as his attempts to educate a more informed reading public about rural life and rural issues.

¹⁵⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'Suffering and Decision', in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Wormald, Roberts, and Gifford, pp. 221-37 (p. 225).

¹⁵⁵ Henry Hart has written on the friendship between and reciprocal influence of Hughes and Heaney, touching upon the importance of rural subject matter in their perceptions of each other: see Henry Hart, 'Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes: A Complex Friendship', in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Wormald, Roberts, and Gifford, pp. 145-59 (pp. 145, 157). For more on their friendship and influence see Mark Wormald, 'Irishwards: Ted Hughes, Freedom and Flow', *Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 6.2 (2017), 58-77.

Seamus Heaney: The Theme is *Patria*

Throughout his career, Seamus Heaney became increasingly preoccupied with the notion of *patria*: a person's native country or homeland (*OED*). The term surfaces in Heaney's poetry in the uncollected poem *An Open Letter*, published in pamphlet form by the Field Day Theatre Company in 1983. It was written as a rebuke to the editors of the 1982 *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion, who included Heaney – among other poets from Northern Ireland – in their anthology.¹⁵⁶ Raised as a Catholic with a Nationalist background and resident at the time in the Republic of Ireland, Heaney objects in the poem to being labelled 'British':

You'll understand I draw the line
At being robbed of what is mine,
My *patria*, my deep design
To be at home
In my own place and dwell within
Its proper name –

Traumatic Ireland! Checkpoints, cairns,
Slated roofs, stone ditches, ferns,
Dublin squares where sunset burns
the Georgian brick –
The whole imagined country mourns
Its lost, erotic

Aisling life.¹⁵⁷

An Open Letter does more than correct a case of mistaken national identity. Heaney's tone may be mocking but his *patria* is a 'deep design', something that has been carefully

¹⁵⁶ Heaney had in fact previously featured in *The Young British Poets*, ed. by Jeremy Robson (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971). I am grateful to Cian Murphy for bringing this to my attention.

¹⁵⁷ Seamus Heaney, *An Open Letter* (Derry: Field Day Theatre Company, 1983), p. 10. Heaney was not the only one to draw attention to the use of the term 'British' in a Northern Irish context, and with particular reference to his own poetry. Elsewhere in the poem, he refers to remarks made by numerous reviewers of the anthology: "Under a common flag," said Larkin. | "Different history," said Haughton. | Our own fastidious John Jordan | Raised an eyebrow: | How British were the Ulstermen? | He'd like to know' (p. 9). For the reviews in question, see Philip Larkin, 'Under a Common Flag', *Observer*, 14 November 1982, 28; Hugh Haughton, 'Twenty for the Eighties', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 January 1983, 78; and John Jordan, *Irish Press*, 1 August 1983, p. 9. For further discussions of Heaney's 'An Open Letter', see Marilyn J. Richtarik, *Acting Between the Lines: The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics, 1980-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 146-64; Dennis O'Driscoll, 'Heaney in Public', in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, ed. Bernard O'Donoghue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 56-72; and Richard Rankin Russell, *Seamus Heaney's Regions* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), pp. 212-39.

considered by the poet in a literary as well as a political sense. The form of the poem is borrowed from Burns, whose ‘Habbie stanza’ Heaney describes in a 1997 essay on the Scottish poet as a form which ‘sets its cap rather too winsomely at the reader’ but also ‘inheres in something much bigger and older and more ballad-fastened’.¹⁵⁸ Heaney’s poem gestures to both of these aspects, at once making fun of itself and tapping into long-standing national traditions as well as divisions. When it comes to Heaney’s ‘Ireland of the mind’, his feeling of *patria* is all the more potent for the fact that the language as well as the territory is contested. It is, after all, in the ‘name’, and not in the country itself, that Heaney desires to dwell and feel ‘at home’. Ireland, for him, is a construct, a mental space as much as it is a real place, and while it is undeniably informed by conditions on the ground – the presence of ‘Checkpoints’ and ‘Georgian brick’ – it is an ‘imagined country’ that he describes in mourning for itself.

Heaney may take his inspiration from Burns in *An Open Letter*, but he also invokes *patria* with an acute awareness of a long tradition of writing about place and identity in Ireland.¹⁵⁹ By the time he wrote the poem, he had already published an essay entitled ‘The Sense of Place’ (1980), on how ‘the different senses of Ireland, of Northern Ireland, and of specific places on our island, have affected poets’.¹⁶⁰ In the essay, in which Heaney discusses the work of a number of Irish and Northern Irish poets both historical and contemporary, his point of origin is the *dinnseanchas* tradition: ‘poems and tales which relate the original meaning of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology’.¹⁶¹ Likewise, in *An Open Letter*, it is to another tradition specific to the Irish language that Heaney turns when

¹⁵⁸ Seamus Heaney, ‘Burns’s Art Speech’, in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), pp. 216-33 (p. 229). Heaney dedicates significant portions of his essay to discussions of two poems written in the ‘Burns stanza’: ‘To a Mouse’ (pp. 218-22) and ‘The Vision’, a poem which he refers to as ‘Burns’s *aisling*’ (pp. 230-32).

¹⁵⁹ In his essay on Burns, Heaney compares the Scottish poet with the Ulster native Irish Language poet Cathal Búí MacGiolla Ghunna (1680 – 1756): see Heaney, Burns’s Art Speech’, pp. 222-24.

¹⁶⁰ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Sense of Place’, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-78* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 131-149 (p. 131), originally delivered as a lecture in the Ulster Museum, January 1977.

¹⁶¹ Heaney, ‘The Sense of Place’, p. 131.

articulating his nationalist sensibility. Characterising Ireland as in mourning for its ‘lost, erotic || *Aisling* life’, he alludes to the conventions of *aisling* poetry, a genre of poems that take the form of dream visions in which the speaker typically converses with a spirit woman, who is also a personification of Ireland, and who is usually symbolic of the country’s fate under colonial occupation.¹⁶² *Patria* may not be an exclusively Irish notion by itself, but when summoned in an Irish context – in Heaney’s mind at least – it takes on a specific literary and historical significance.¹⁶³

Late in his career, Heaney demonstrated a renewed interest in the concept of *patria*. The term resurfaces in 2003, in an essay on the ‘staying power’ of pastoral poetry, and then again in 2004, in a review for *The Irish Times* of a new translation of Virgil’s *Georgics* by Heaney’s friend and occasional publisher, the poet and farmer Peter Fallon.¹⁶⁴ In his favourable review, Heaney identifies *patria* as the presiding theme of the *Georgics*, contrasting the work with Virgil’s more military oriented and lauded *Aeneid*:

Virgil began his epic in or around 29BC, the year when he is reputed to have finished ‘The Georgics’ and to have read its four constituent books over four days to

¹⁶² Heaney draws on the conventions of the *aisling* tradition throughout his own poetry: see in particular ‘Ocean’s Love to Ireland’, ‘Aisling’, and ‘Act of Union’ in *North* (1975), ‘An Aisling in the Burren’ in *Station Island* (1984), and ‘The Disappearing Island’ in *The Haw Lantern* (1987). *An Open Letter* was in part inspired by an essay on the subject of *patria* by the English poet and critic Donald Davie, which argued that the female gender often allotted to *patria* (‘motherland’, ‘mother tongue’) counteracts some of the bias in the etymology of the term in ‘pater’ (father): see Donald Davie, ‘Poet: Patriot: Interpreter’, *Critical Inquiry*, 9.1, The Politics of Interpretation (September 1982), 27-43 (p. 29). This idea is referenced directly by Heaney in the poem in stanza 21: ‘It is the way his words imply / That *patria* is maidenly / (Is “pang of ravishment” not O.K.?) / That touched me most / Who long felt my identity / So rudely forced’ (p. 11). Eavan Boland, who at the time questioned Heaney’s motivations for writing *An Open Letter* (see Richtarik, p 159), has criticised *aisling* conventions on feminist grounds, especially ‘the sort of Irish poem which availed of that old, potent blurring of feminine and national’: see Eavan Boland, ‘Outside History,’ *American Poetry Review*, 19.2 (March/April 1990), 32-38 (p. 36). In *The Redress of Poetry*, Heaney draws attention to the ways in which the Irish language poet Brian Merriman ‘revised and implicitly criticized the *aisling* genre’ in his comic poem *The Midnight Court*, raising the possibility that he himself may be doing the same in *An Open Letter*: see Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), p. 55.

¹⁶³ Henry Hart and David Wheatley have both touched upon the importance of *patria* when it comes to Heaney’s relationship with the Irish language. Commenting on Heaney’s translation of *Buile Suibhne*, *Sweeney Astray* (1983), Hart claims that, for Heaney, Sweeney is ‘an objective correlative for his ambivalence towards the *matria*’: see Henry Hart, *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 156. For David Wheatley, on the other hand, Heaney’s ‘strongly centred’ sense of ‘bilingual inheritance’ reinforces his Gaelic identity: see David Wheatley, “‘The bilingual race / And truth of that water’: Seamus Heaney and the Irish Language”, *Journal of European Studies*, 46.1 (2016), 10-23 (p. 15).

¹⁶⁴ Heaney draws attention to multiple references to *patria* in the first verse of ‘Eclogue 1’ (ll. 3-5): see Heaney, ‘Eclogues “In Extremis”’, p. 3. Fallon published Heaney a number of times and in various forms, most significantly under his own Gallery Press with *The Midnight Verdict* (1993) and Heaney’s Nobel Prize Speech *Crediting Poetry* (1995), as well as the pamphlet *The Riverbank Field* (2007).

Octavian, fresh from his victory at the battle of Actium. Understandably, therefore, *imperium*, the triumph of Rome, was the theme of the new work: 'The Aeneid' is the poet's *hommage* [*sic*] to the cool-headed, if somewhat cool-hearted *princeps*, the leader who will reconstruct an ordered society out of the ravaged republic. But where *The Aeneid* begins with an invocation of 'arms and the man', 'The Georgics' begins with the crops and the stock because here the theme is not *imperium* but *patria*, love of the land, the physical ground that is the people's home ground, the ground Virgil will stand up for as a poet and will keep standing over.¹⁶⁵

Tracing the conception of *The Aeneid* in the initial reception of the *Georgics*, Heaney remains aware that *patria* is closely related to both 'patriot' and 'patriarch' and is therefore a term troubled by questions of origins, land-rights and power – not to mention gender. Having already highlighted the presence of the word in the first of Virgil's *Eclogues*, Heaney also demonstrates how the 'people's home ground' is bound up with the rule of the '*princeps*', and how the 'arms and the man' inevitably loom large over 'the crops and the stock'. As a poet interested in the legacies of imperialism, ideas of home ground, and the role of the writer in the political sphere – especially when it comes to the contested notion of nationalism in Northern Ireland – it is easy to see how the Virgilian concept of *patria* proved an important one for Heaney.

Where previously Heaney turned to Irish language traditions when invoking his own *patria*, Virgil's middle poem became an important touchstone for the poet in the last decade of his life. In 2007, Heaney delivered a lecture on Ted Hughes, published posthumously as 'Suffering and Decision.' In the essay, Heaney tells the story of a poet 'born in the north of his native country, [...] familiar with the fields and rivers of his district', and describes how the 'early work' of this poet 'could not have been written without his memories of that first life in the unfashionable, non-literary world of his childhood'.¹⁶⁶ He concludes his account by speaking about how in the poet's maturity 'the poetry he wrote had a tragic visionary quality, darkened by a sense of his own country's history of war [...] and further darkened by a

¹⁶⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Glory Be to the World', review of Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Peter Fallon (2004), *Irish Times*, 23 Oct 2004, p. 10. Heaney is listed by Fallon in the acknowledgements to the translation under those who provided 'instructive readings' of the work-in-progress: see Peter Fallon, 'Afterwords', *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by Peter Fallon (Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 2004), pp. 120-27 (p. 127).

¹⁶⁶ Heaney, 'Suffering and Decision', p. 221.

feeling of responsibility for the threatened world which he had lived to see.’¹⁶⁷ Heaney eventually reveals that the story contains ‘all the received truths about the historical and creative life’ of Virgil, making the claim that it ‘could equally well be read as [a version] of the life of Ted Hughes.’¹⁶⁸ He then comments on the degree to which a ‘love of the land’ is of vital importance in terms of both Virgil’s and Hughes’s sense of poetic vocation, explaining how

in the aftermath of the civil wars that ravaged Italy in his lifetime, [Virgil] very deliberately link[ed] his celebration of farm work in *The Georgics* to the work of repairing a devastated countryside and the restoration of belief in a *patria* among the cruelly disrupted rural population.¹⁶⁹

Heaney then proposes that Hughes’s *Moortown* ‘could be read as a local variation of the theme of Virgil’s *Georgics*, insofar as it is his act of thanksgiving for the fulfilments he experienced in his middle and late years when he was integrated into the life and land of Devon.’¹⁷⁰ What Heaney does not state explicitly, but which is implied by the content and context of the comparison, is that in this late essay he is also describing his own historical and creative life, along with the situation in Ireland – especially during his ‘late years’, in which he returns to the ‘celebration of farm work’ in collections such as *Electric Light* (2001) and *District and Circle* (2006).¹⁷¹

A number of commentators have already highlighted the georgic qualities of Heaney’s poetry.¹⁷² As referenced in the introduction, Thomas makes a strong case for Heaney’s poetry as georgic.¹⁷³ In an early study, Blake Morrison mentions the georgic with

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 223.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 224.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁷¹ I am grateful to Neil Corcoran for this observation. Heaney also compares Hughes’s and Virgil’s lives to that of Dante but for the Hughes’s biographer Jonathan Bate, what Heaney doesn’t register is that the story he tells is also the story of Wordsworth: see Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, p. 13.

¹⁷² The topic has also briefly been touched upon by recent reviewers: see Stephanie Burt, ‘A Bit Like Gulliver’, review of Dennis O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (2008), and *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, edited by Bernard O’Donoghue (2009), *London Review of Books*, 31.11 (11 June 2009), 19-23, and William Logan, ‘Ply the Pen’, review of Seamus Heaney, *Human Chain* (2010), *New York Times*, 24 September 2010, section BR, 18.

¹⁷³ Thomas, ‘Georgics of Resistance’, pp. 140-47.

reference to Heaney's collection *Field Work*, while Edna Longley makes the claim that this collection 'defines itself as *Georgics*'.¹⁷⁴ In an essay published in 2000, on Heaney and the 'bucolic', Bernard O'Donoghue proposes that Fallon's 'distinguished' version of Virgil's *Georgics* may have made 'preparing another contemporary Irish translation seem otiose to Heaney', even though it might be 'more in his element'; and in her study on Irish poetry and the pastoral tradition, Donna L. Potts suggests that Heaney's source of reference for the rural is often not the *Eclogues* but the *Georgics*, though this is not explored in detail.¹⁷⁵ More recently, Iain Twiddy has argued that 'the *Georgics* offer validation of Heaney's link between poetry and agriculture, in providing an account of – and at times a practical guide to – life on the land.'¹⁷⁶

Evidently, as much as commentators are willing to apply the term georgic to Heaney's work, they are equally cautious about making the association. In response to Heaney's first collection *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), Floyd Collins commented upon how the 'polished lines and sophisticated linguistic topography' of the ploughing poem 'Follower', for instance, emphasises Heaney's 'schooling in the ancient pastoral tradition handed down from Virgil's *Georgics*'.¹⁷⁷ According to Anthony Bradley, Heaney's precedent in the volume could be the *Georgics*, though this statement is made without the wish 'in any way to suggest influence, only analogues'.¹⁷⁸ As both of these assessments make clear (and I will be returning to them below), for Heaney's pastoral poetry to contain georgic elements is one thing, but for the poet to write self-consciously in the georgic mode is another. The following sustained and in-depth analysis of Heaney's georgic poetry shines a light on the

¹⁷⁴ Blake Morrison, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 73, and Edna Longley, *Poetry and Posterity* (Tarset: Bloodaxe, 2000), p. 104.

¹⁷⁵ Bernard O'Donoghue, 'Heaney's Classics and the Bucolic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, pp. 106-21 (p. 119, n. 6), and Donna L. Potts, *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2011), p. 51.

¹⁷⁶ Twiddy, p. 126.

¹⁷⁷ Floyd Collins, *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity* (Newark, N.J.: University of Delaware Press, 2003), p. 39.

¹⁷⁸ Anthony Bradley, 'Pastoral in Modern Irish Poetry', *Concerning Poetry*, 14.2 (1981), 79-96 (p. 90).

various indirect ways in which he emulates Virgil's treatment of rural, civil, and environmental issues; it also reveals that, while the notion of 'analogues' suffices for the early work, the example of Virgil's *Georgics* had a direct impact on Heaney's late poetry.

Chapters III and IV examine Heaney's changing attitude towards the georgic, specifically when it comes to the theme of *patria*. Heaney may have only expressed an interest in the georgic late in his career, but a further examination of his poetry about 'the life and land' of Ireland reveals that he was in fact formulating the ideas that he would later articulate as 'georgic' long before he considered Virgil's *Georgics* as an influence. Furthermore, both chapters show how the poetry of agriculture as exemplified by other poets – such as Hughes, for instance – informed Heaney's own efforts to restore a sense of *patria* in an Irish context.

In an observation echoed by others, Henry Hart points out that 'Heaney has followed what was once called the *rota Vergiliana* (Virgil's cycle)', in the sense that he 'began his career writing pastorals and proceeded to tackle the epic'.¹⁷⁹ Yet any notion that Heaney's output enacts 'Virgil's cycle' also implies the presence of the georgic in his work. Chapter III looks again at this first turn of Virgil's wheel, charting the poet's negotiations with modal discrepancies between pastoral, georgic, and epic (and anti-pastoral, counter-georgic, latent epic, to name a few more), as well as with particular issues relating to history, agriculture, the land, and Ireland. In an essay on Robert Frost's use of the pastoral and his depiction of 'country things', Robert Faggen comments upon the difficulty of defining and distinguishing the pastoral and the georgic, arguing that 'works in both modes have rarely proved to be

¹⁷⁹ Hart, p. 29. This is an interpretation echoed by John Kerrigan, who argues that when 'Heaney translates the *Buile Suibhne* for Field Day, is he not producing a national epic to follow his bucolics and poems of digging and ploughing, from *Death of Naturalist* to *Wintering Out*, rather as the *Aeneid* was preceded by the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*?': see John Kerrigan, 'Ulster Ovids', in *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland*, ed. by Neil Corcoran (Bridgend: Seren, 1992), pp. 237-69, (p. 243). Iain Twiddy has more recently made the same observation, stating that 'Heaney's work follows the ecologic progression of Virgil's work, from the early pastoral elegies into epic' (Twiddy, p. 121).

pure'.¹⁸⁰ The same is true when Heaney chooses to write of 'country things' and nowhere more so than in his early collections. In poems about the landscape of his childhood upbringing in Northern Ireland, as well as in poems that draw attention to the disrupted histories of the Irish rural poor in the context of British imperialism, Heaney's representation of rural life is characterised by an ambiguous, even ambivalent, tone when it comes to the traditions which the poems are written out of and against.

Following the posthumous release of Heaney's translation of Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid* (2016), the time is now ripe to reassess his relationship with his classical forebear. Over the course of his last three collections, Heaney once again echoes the career path of Virgil. When viewed as a triptych, *Electric Light*, *District and Circle*, and his final volume, *Human Chain* (2010), come to represent a more distinct and self-conscious turning of 'Virgil's Wheel', with Heaney revisiting pastoral, georgic and epic respectively in each collection. Heaney's return to the pastoral in *Electric Light* has already been examined, as has his engagement with Virgil's *Aeneid* in *Human Chain*, in particular his treatment of Book VI in the sequence 'Route 110'.¹⁸¹ Comparable classical influences in *District and Circle*, however, remain overlooked. Heaney's second and more self-assured georgic turn, which finds him increasingly aware of classical precedents – as well as more inclined to allude to them – is the subject of Chapter IV. This chapter will assess the impact of Fallon's translation upon late Heaney, which was being prepared and published in the years directly preceding

¹⁸⁰ Robert Faggen, 'Frost and the Questions of Pastoral', in *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. by Robert Faggen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 49-74 (p. 54).

¹⁸¹ On Virgilian pastoral in *Electric Light*, see: O'Donoghue, pp. 106-21; Wes Davis, 'From Mossbawn to Meliboeus: Seamus Heaney's Ambivalent Pastoralism', *Southwest Review*, 92.1 (2007), 100-15; Meg Tyler, *A Singing Contest: Conventions of Sound in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 50-73; Twiddy, pp. 125-47; and Paul Alpers, 'Modern Eclogues', *TriQuarterly*, 116 (2003), 20-47. On Virgil and the *Aeneid* in *Human Chain*, see: Stephen Heiny, 'Virgil in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*: "Images and Symbols Adequate to Our Predicament"', *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, 65.4 (2013), 304-19; Hugh Haughton, 'First and Last Things', *Irish Review*, 49-50 (Winter-Spring 2014/2015), 194-07; Michael Parker, "'Back in the heartland": Seamus Heaney's "Route 110" Sequence in *Human Chain*', *Irish Studies Review*, 21.4 (2013), 374-86, and "'His nibs": Self Reflexivity and the Significance of Translation in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*', *Irish University Review*, 42.2 (2012), 327-50; Michael C. J. Putnam, 'Virgil and Heaney: Route 110', *Arion*, 19.3 (2012), 79-108; Russell, *Seamus Heaney's Regions*, pp. 393-40; and Florence Impens, "'Help me please my hedge-school master": Virgilian Presences in the Work of Seamus Heaney', *Irish University Review*, 47.2 (2017), 251-65.

District and Circle. As O'Donoghue has suggested, Fallon's version may have discouraged Heaney from trying his own hand at a new English language version, but this does not preclude the idea that Virgil's middle poem informs his work in subtler but no less profound ways.

The georgic tradition did not strictly begin with Virgil's *Georgics*, and neither does it end with it. The following examination of Heaney's engagement with the georgic acknowledges the influence of other writers – some within and some outside the georgic tradition – upon Heaney's agricultural poetry. Heaney draws from a wide range of sources when writing about his home ground – from Hesiod to Ted Hughes, and many in-between. In 'Englands of the Mind' (first published under the title 'Now and in England' in 1977), Heaney employs a terminology that anticipates his defence in *An Open Letter*, making the case that even certain poets in England (who belong to 'the mother culture', as he puts it) are likewise 'now possessed of that defensive love of their territory which was once shared only by those poets whom we might call colonial', and how '[t]heir very terrain is becoming consciously precious'.¹⁸² What Heaney is describing here is those poets' sense of *patria*, and one of the poets he is describing is Hughes. Yet, as *An Open Letter* makes clear, *patria* in England means something different than it does in Ireland. The same is true of the georgic. Agriculture in Ireland comes with its own specific history: a colonial one. At the heart of Heaney's georgic poetry is the following issue, which was also an issue for Virgil: is it possible to restore a faith in the land if that land has been scarred by war? This thesis examines Heaney's efforts to find an answer to this predicament.

¹⁸² Seamus Heaney, 'Englands of the Mind', *Preoccupations*, pp. 150-169 (pp. 150-152), originally published as 'Now and in England', *Critical Inquiry*, 3.3 (Spring 1977), 471-88. The poets discussed in the essay were Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, and Philip Larkin.

Alice Oswald: Not a Nature Poet?

In one of the first published statements by Alice Oswald about her own work, written upon the publication of her debut collection of poems, *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* (1996), the poet expresses an anxiety about the perception of her poetry. She states what she is not (a nature poet), and what she would prefer to be thought of as (a poet who is also a gardener):

I've been a gardener for nearly seven years, I'm not a nature poet, though I do write about the special nature of what happens to exist. People are so delighted by the idea of gardening, but in the end it weathers you away. The inaccessibility of what you're working with becomes terrible. I do write about that.¹⁸³

Evidently, even before her poetry was widely read, Oswald was apprehensive about the context in which her work would be interpreted. Not only this, but she objects to the way in which the activity of gardening is itself perceived, arguing that far from being 'delightful', in actual fact it 'weathers you away'. Oswald's statement is suggestive in a number of ways of the distinct space that she has since carved out for herself (an appropriately manual metaphor) as a poet, in relation to both contemporary writing and poetic tradition. As chapters V and VI demonstrate, Oswald's subject is not Nature but the nature of the environment at large; she writes not about the 'idea' of working outdoors but of the 'inaccessibility' of the experience and its terror.

Oswald was right to be concerned about her work being misunderstood. In a review of her second book of poetry, *Dart* (2002), in *The Times*, Jeanette Winterson uses the very epithet of 'nature poet' to describe her.¹⁸⁴ Yet readers of her work have turned out to be less naïve than the poet feared, and the term 'nature poet' does not always carry the connotations to which she objects. Winterson goes on to claim that Oswald is the 'rightful heir' to the poet Ted Hughes, and qualifies her statement by explaining that Oswald's 'nature' is 'not the

¹⁸³ Alice Oswald, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile', in *Don't Ask Me What I Mean: Poets in their Own Words*, ed. by Clare Brown and Don Paterson (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2003), pp. 207-08 (p. 207). This statement was originally published in the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 168 (Spring 1996).

¹⁸⁴ Jeanette Winterson, 'Against the Flow', review of Alice Oswald, *Dart* (1996), *Times*, 3 August 2002, 15 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/journalism/alice-oswald/>> [accessed 25 May 2017].

Nature of footpaths and theme parks' but of 'open space and untamed life'.¹⁸⁵ In a review of Oswald's second lyric collection *Woods etc.* (2005), Aingeal Clare also compares Oswald to Hughes and finds the poet's insistence that she is not a nature poet to be 'a strange protest, given that "nature poetry" isn't quite the quaint Romantic throwback it used to be'.¹⁸⁶ More recently, Chloe Stopa-Hunt, in a review of Oswald's 2011 'excavation' of Homer's *Iliad*, *Memorial* (2011), describes how Oswald's 'luminous, muscular nature poetry (in collections including *Woods etc.* and *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*) is grounded in the Hughesian tradition'.¹⁸⁷ Additionally, in a review of a biography of Samuel Palmer in 2012, Seamus Perry comments upon the similarities of Hughes's and Oswald's poetry in the context of a recent vogue for anti-pastoral poetry; for Perry, 'Hughes's windswept and bloody *Moortown Diary* gives you the daily life of a shepherd as it really is', and Oswald poetry works according to a similar principles, with her *Dart* resembling 'a patiently assembled mosaic of collective memory recording the history of a working waterway'.¹⁸⁸ Judging by these comments, Oswald's anxiety about the label 'nature poet' appears to be far more pronounced in her own mind than in the minds of her critics, but it is an anxiety worth paying heed to nonetheless. If Hughes can be thought of as both a 'nature poet' and an actual shepherd, then what does it mean for Oswald to be both a poet and a gardener, as well as a poet who charts the 'working' lives of people on a river? Perry places both Hughes and Oswald in the context of the anti-pastoral tradition. The contention of chapters V and VI is that if Oswald's poetry is indeed 'nature poetry', then it is poetry that can be thought of, as in the case of Hughes's, as georgic.

¹⁸⁵ Winterson, p. 15. These comments closely resemble Seamus Heaney's assessment of Hughes's poetry in 'Englands of the Mind', in which he states that 'Hughes's is a primeval landscape where stones cry out and horizons endure, where the elements inhabit the mind with a religious force': see Heaney, 'Englands of the Mind', pp. 151-2.

¹⁸⁶ Aingeal Clare, 'Outcanoevre', review of Alice Oswald, *Woods etc.* (2005), *London Review of Books*, 28.6 (23 March 2006), 27-30.

¹⁸⁷ Chloe Stopa-Hunt, 'Visible Vanishing', review of Alice Oswald, *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* (2011), *Oxonian Review*, 18.5 (12 March 2012) <<http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/visible-vanishing/>> [accessed 6 May 2017].

¹⁸⁸ Seamus Perry, 'The Shoreham Gang', review of Rachel Campbell-Johnston, *Mysterious Wisdom: The Life and Work of Samuel Palmer* (2011), *London Review of Books*, 34.7 (5 April 2012), 30-33.

While Oswald should not necessarily be taken at her word when it comes to the way that her work is received, her remarks are useful for framing her body of work as a whole. From the very beginning, Oswald uses her experience as a gardener as a way of singling herself out as a writer. It is a tactic that seems designed to furnish the poet with a degree of authority, instilling within her readers the sense that when it comes to the natural world she really does know what she is talking about – that she has got her hands dirty. It also serves the purpose of fostering associations with other writers who have worked outdoors – a lineage of poets who experienced manual labour first hand, including John Clare, Robert Frost, and Samuel Beckett, to name a few examples – and one that reaches her primarily through Hughes. At the same time, Oswald’s self-positioning is to some extent contradictory: her self-styled status as a gardener-poet is esoteric, offering her a perspective that is denied to most writers and readers, and which is earned through having engaged with the world through work. In the poems themselves, on the other hand, she aims to be both open and down-to-earth; both in touch with the lowest of life-forms and – in a democratic way of speaking – with those who work with their hands. This project’s investigation into Oswald poetry aims to reconcile, or at least to acknowledge the conflict between, these two positions.

The comparison commonly made by reviewers of Oswald’s work with that of Hughes has proven a fruitful one for the poet herself. In her 2005 Ted Hughes memorial lecture, Oswald states that *Moortown Diary* is especially relevant to her own poetic project because he worked on it ‘when he was spending almost every day outside, either gardening or farming’.¹⁸⁹ Hughes is an important precedent for Oswald not only for what he wrote and the way he wrote it, but also for the fact that he directly experienced the agricultural scenarios he describes. According to Oswald, the situation of the farm in *Moortown Diary* keeps the poet’s language grounded in the ‘actual’: she refers to the work as ‘site specific’, highlighting

¹⁸⁹ Alice Oswald, ‘Wild Things’, *Guardian*, 3 December 2005
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/dec/03/poetry.tedhughes/>> [accessed 28 November 2016].

Hughes's efforts to exclude 'the poetic process' with the aim of 'staying close' to his material.¹⁹⁰ It is a style 'bent by reality,' as she puts it, in which 'something bigger than the verse pushes in from outside'.¹⁹¹ 'Bent by reality' would be an appropriate term to describe Oswald's own writing, and the question of precisely what she means when she refers to 'something bigger' than the poetry itself – a something that 'pushes in from outside' – provides a useful provocation for this thesis's inquiry into what lies both on the inside and the outside of Oswald's poetry.

In her prose as well as her verse, Oswald consistently makes the analogy between mental and manual labour, and looks to those who work with their hands as exemplars of her approach: gardeners and farmers, for example, are those who experience the natural world, as she puts it in her Hughes lecture, as 'something present' with a 'thickness and function'.¹⁹² Elsewhere in the lecture, she recounts how, to begin with, her reading experiences were in contrast to her experiences as a gardener, recalling that '[she] thought [she'd] rather hear a gardener's or a farmer's account of the landscape than any poet's'.¹⁹³ Significantly, this was before she had come across Hughes. The 'thought' in this statement is also significant, for Oswald's experience as a gardener was not in actual fact that much at odds with her reading. Manual labourers are certainly an important influence on her work (an influence that is acknowledged throughout chapters V and VI), but Oswald's preoccupation with the natural world is also undeniably a longstanding literary concern, deriving first and foremost from her studies of the classics.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.; see *CP*, p. 1205.

¹⁹¹ Alice Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain Makes the World Alive with Noise', in *A Green Thought in a Green Shade: Poetry in the Garden*, ed. by Sarah Maguire (London: The Poetry Society, 2000), pp. 35-48 (p. 39).

¹⁹² Oswald, 'Wild Things'.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

One of Oswald's most enduring and profound influences is Homer, whom she discovered long before she read Hughes.¹⁹⁴ Explaining her fascination with Homer in an interview with Max Porter in 2014, she states:

[Homer] just transmits life. No mediation. He describes a leaf and you don't get a description of a leaf, you get a proper leaf. That's always been my principle. You've got to make something living, and thinking isn't living.¹⁹⁵

If thinking is not living, then for Oswald writers are predisposed to overthink things. The oral poet, on the other hand, as exemplified by Homer, is less inclined to render the natural world in an abstract sense. Like Ruskin before her, Oswald's admiration for Homer stems from the idea that his poetry goes straight to the heart of the 'the facts of the thing'.¹⁹⁶ Poetry, in Oswald's formulation, is another form of making (from the Greek '*poiesis*'), and so instead of being an abstraction of the world it functions as a re-working of it.

This notion is key to Oswald's idea of an environmentally sound poetics (for the work of listening, as we shall see, is also crucial for Oswald).¹⁹⁷ In fact, Homer's example provides such an important precedent in this regard that when speaking to Fiona Cox she makes the claim that 'Homer is a completely ecological poet, despite the fact that he lived in the eighth century and wasn't trying to transmit that message.'¹⁹⁸ Oswald herself has been identified as an ecological poet on numerous occasions.¹⁹⁹ Yet when asked by Garry Mackenzie on

¹⁹⁴ Oswald was introduced to Homer while studying for her A-levels and later went on to study classics at New College, Oxford. In an interview with Fiona Cox in 2013, she explains how over the course of her studies, both during her A-levels and her degree, she concentrated her attention almost entirely on Homer: see Fiona Cox, 'Interview with Alice Oswald', *Practitioners' Voices in Classical Reception Studies* (2013) <<http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/2013/oswald>> [accessed 28 November 2016].

¹⁹⁵ Max Porter, 'Interview with Alice Oswald', *White Review*, August 2014 <<http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-alice-oswald/>> [accessed 28 November 2016].

¹⁹⁶ John Ruskin, 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy', *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), V, pp. 204-20 (p. 213).

¹⁹⁷ I will return to the subject of the importance of listening for Oswald in chapter VI below. For more on the acoustic sensitivities of Oswald's poetry see Mary Pinard, 'Voice(s) of the Poet-Gardener: Alice Oswald and the Poetry of Acoustic Encounter', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*, 10.2 (2009), 17-32; and Jack Thacker, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Style: Alice Oswald's Acoustic Arrangements', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 44.2 (June 2015), 103-18.

¹⁹⁸ Oswald, cited in Cox.

¹⁹⁹ In an early essay, Mary Pinard draws attention to Oswald's 'blending of ecological sensibilities' as both poet and gardener (Pinard, p. 18). Since then, an increasing number of articles and chapters have appeared in which Oswald's poetry has been interpreted from an ecocritical standpoint, especially when it comes to *Dart*: see John Parham, "'Two Ply": Discordant Nature and English Landscape in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 64 (April 2012), 111-29; Kym Martindale, 'She Do the River in Different Voices: Lyric

whether she considered her own long poem *Dart* to be an ‘ecopoem’, she replies: ‘that [label] has a cramping feeling. Sometimes if there’s too much of an idea behind the writing the poem can’t quite come alive’.²⁰⁰ Seemingly – or at least this is what Oswald would like her readers to believe – her poetry does not carry an explicit environmental message.²⁰¹ Instead, if Oswald’s reading of Homer anything to go by, her technique is to render the outside world as authentically *real*: ‘one of the first things we have to do is to transform the imagination’, she argues when asked about the present environmental crisis, ‘and I think it’s magic that does that, rather than preaching and explanation and allegory’.²⁰²

The key to transforming the imagination, for Oswald, is through work. As she puts it in her Hughes lecture, ‘those of us who don’t work outdoors are somehow removed from its meaning, abroad in our own surroundings. We walk outside and a fog of nostalgia comes over us.’²⁰³ Oswald blames this nostalgia firmly on poetic tradition, specifically the ‘lyrical, romantic, pastoral tradition of “Nature poetry”’, which she associates with the picturesque and romantic sublime.²⁰⁴ Another area in which Oswald exerts a great amount of energy is in distancing herself from these movements in English poetry. She traces the term ‘nostalgia,’ for instance, back to its origins in the eighteenth-century as a word coined ‘to describe

Democracies in Alice Oswald’s *Dart*, in *Process: Landscape and Text*, ed. by Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 309-28; David Farrier, “‘Like a Stone’: Ecology, *Enargeia*, and Ethical Time in Alice Oswald’s *Memorial*”, *Environmental Humanities*, 4 (2014), 1-18; Tom Bristow, ‘Bioregional Biography and the Geography of Affect: Spatialised Somnambulance in Alice Oswald’s *Sleepwalk on the Severn*’, *AJE: Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, 4 (2014/2015), 1-21, and *The Anthropocene Lyric: An Affective Geography of Poetry, Person, Place* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 77-106; Rowan Middleton, ‘Connection, Disconnection and the Self in Alice Oswald’s *Dart*’, *Green Letters*, 19.2 (2015), 157-69; and Garry MacKenzie, ‘Poetry, Ecocriticism and Labour: The Work of Writing and Reading’, *Green Letters*, 20.2 (2016), 183-96.

²⁰⁰ Oswald, cited in MacKenzie, p. 190.

²⁰¹ This is not always the case, however, the exception being *Dart* (see chapter VI).

²⁰² Oswald, cited in Cox.

²⁰³ Oswald, ‘Wild Things’.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Oswald is often vague about the specific targets of her critique. In an essay on poetry and gardening, however, she singles out the ‘pathetic fallacy’ of Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheard’s Calendar*, objecting to the way in which often ‘the physical landscape stands for the psychological’: see Oswald, ‘The Universe in Time of Rain’, p. 37-38. Elsewhere, Wordsworth is the target of her criticism for not being ‘the real thing’, but as she reveals in an interview with Janet Phillips, she regrets making this argument so emphatically: see Janet Phillips, ‘A Leaf Out of her Book: Alice Oswald’, *The Poetry Society*, <<http://archive.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/publications/poetrynews/pn2005/asprofile/>> [accessed 25 April 2018].

depression among soldiers billeted abroad'.²⁰⁵ For Oswald, a landscape can be colonised as can other nations: 'We're colonizing it,' she insists in an interview in 2012, reverting to the collective pronoun 'we' and the generalising 'it' to emphasise that it is the use of language first and foremost that shapes and misshapes perceptions of the environment.²⁰⁶

Oswald's objection to the nostalgia of tradition is reflected in her role as the editor of the anthology *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet* (2005). The book's title is taken from a poem by the Romantic poet and agricultural labourer John Clare and provides an indication of the content of the volume's contents. In her introduction, she announces: 'No prospects, pastorals or nostalgic poems are in here,' citing such examples as 'an obstacle to ecology'.²⁰⁷ For a poem to truly ecological, according to Oswald, it must work against a sense of detachment and towards putting its reader in proximity with the strangeness of natural – as well as man-made – forms. The anthology is a roll-call of past and present poets of the countryside, poet-naturalists and poet-environmentalists: William Barnes, Wendell Berry, Robert Burns, John Clare, William Cowper, Robert Frost, Thomas Hardy, Seamus Heaney, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Ted Hughes, Patrick Kavanagh, D. H. Lawrence, Norman MacCaig, Les Murray, Katrina Porteous, Gary Snyder, Edward Thomas, and R. S. Thomas are presented alongside Homer as ecological poets. Among these, surprisingly – but no less significantly – are writers of a different kind, modernist poets and figures of the *avant-garde*: E. E. Cummings, David Jones, James Joyce, Marianne Moore, Samuel Beckett, John Ashbury, and Ian Hamilton Finlay. As will become increasingly clear over the course of

²⁰⁵ Oswald, 'Wild Things'.

²⁰⁶ Madeline Bunting, 'Alice Oswald on the Devonshire Landscape: "There's a terror in beauty"', *Guardian*, 13 July 2012, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jul/13/alice-oswald-devonshire-landscape>> [accessed 13 Jan 2017].

²⁰⁷ Alice Oswald, 'Introduction: The Dew's Harp', *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet*, ed. by Alice Oswald (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) pp. ix-x (p. x). The statement is indicator of her anti-enlightenment sentiment. Oswald would certainly quarrel with Joseph Addison when he says that 'sight is the most perfect and most delightful of all our senses,' preferring herself to focus on the hard work of listening, implicit in her singling out of the phrase 'the thunder *mutters*' (emphasis added) from Clare's poem 'The thunder mutters louder and more loud': see Joseph Addison, 'No. 411, Saturday, June 21, 1712 [Addison on the Pleasures of the Imagination]', *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*, ed. by Eric Mackie (Boston; New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1998), pp. 387-89 (p. 387).

chapters V and VI, as much as Oswald is indebted to those who have worked on the land and those who write about that work, she also takes inspiration from those who have chiselled away at the language itself, fashioning new forms and ways of perceiving words.

Given Oswald's insistence that she is not a 'nature poet' the question is therefore raised: what kind of poet can she be thought of? Is it enough to take Oswald at her word and avoid such categorisations altogether, accepting that she is simply a poet who writes, in her own formulation, about 'what happens to exist'? Robert Baker argues that Oswald is 'a Heraclitean and Ovidian poet', and that 'metamorphosis and mimesis are among her primary themes'.²⁰⁸ Yet no sooner is such a statement proffered than Oswald's work metamorphoses and takes on new properties. One minute she expresses her problem with the 'nature poet' label, and in another she proclaims, this time speaking to Porter, that 'nature poetry is just another kind of metaphysical poetry and is exactly what [she likes],' arguing that the 'best nature poets are Homer, Ovid, Shakespeare, because they include the human and the non-human in the same picture'.²⁰⁹ 'How can you categorise that?', she goes on to conclude – and the challenge is one that extends to readers of her own work. Homer, Ovid, and Shakespeare all provide useful precedents, as do, Pinard observes, 'Virgil, Hopkins, Hughes, Finlay, Heaney'.²¹⁰ While acknowledging that Oswald is indeed an Ovidian poet as much as she is a metaphysical poet or an ecological poet, the contention of this thesis is that Oswald is also a profoundly georgic poet because in her work the human and the non-human are, as she puts it, 'in the same picture'.

²⁰⁸ Robert Baker, "'All voices should be read as the river's mutterings': The Poetry of Alice Oswald", *Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.2 (2017), 99-118 (p. 103).

²⁰⁹ Oswald, cited in Porter. In a review of Oswald's most recent collection *Falling Awake* (2016), Lucy Mercer elaborates on the metaphysical qualities of her work: 'Oswald's poetic examinations continue to be channelled through strictly metaphysical imagery, by which I mean *meta* – a discourse of the structure of the thing itself, and *physics* – nature: questioning what nature is as a state of being': see Lucy Mercer, 'Back to the Crisis of Living: Time and Trauma in Alice Oswald', *Wild Court*, 17 October 2016 <<http://wildcourt.co.uk/features/657/>> [accessed 25 April 2018].

²¹⁰ Pinard, p. 31.

Writing on the increasing disappearance of words from the environmental lexicon in the British Isles, the nature writer Robert Macfarlane declares that ‘Nature has not now, nor has ever been, a pure category. We inhabit a post-pastoral terrain, full of modification and compromise.’²¹¹ Macfarlane’s reference to the post-pastoral is a useful one, suggesting that in recent times, more than at any other point in history, the state of the environment is critical, and that if we are to recognise this then our language must reflect it. And yet, as this thesis maintains, if there was ever a literature of ‘modification and compromise’ then surely it is the georgic. The argument put forward in chapters V and VI is that the georgic as a critical category is able to accommodate Oswald’s preoccupation with working lives – historically and in the present – as well as her desire to forge new and necessary ways of confronting and writing about our relationship with the natural world. Adopting a gardener’s perspective is only one of the ways in which Oswald seeks to give voice to the realities of living and working outdoors; in addition, she fashions a role for herself as poet-sculptor (in *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*, and *Woods etc.*), poet-anthropologist (in *Dart*), and even poet-archaeologist (in *Memorial*). Chapter V examines Oswald’s lyric collections in light of the georgic, in particular her indebtedness to the Scottish artist, poet, and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay. The focus of chapter VI is Oswald’s longer works and the ways in which she channels not just Homer but Virgil in her evocations and excavations of the land. For farmers and gardeners, or indeed anyone who conducts their daily activity on the soil, nature can be both beautiful and terrible, malleable as well as recalcitrant. Keeping in mind the examples of the many influences upon Oswald’s work, literary and non-literary, this thesis examines the working voices in her poetry.

²¹¹ Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), p. 7.

CHAPTER I

A Language of Livestock: Animal Husbandry in the Poetry of Ted Hughes

A poem can survive stylistic blemishes but it cannot survive a still-birth.

Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words'¹

So I let them lie in their rags and tatters.

Ted Hughes, *The Poetry Archive*²

In many respects, the well-known and celebrated poem 'February 17th' is the flagship poem of Ted Hughes's *Moortown Diary*. This could be down to the fact that it was the first poem Hughes chose to publish from his 'casual journal notes' of his time on the farm. In his 'Preface' to the collection, Hughes writes about how in the 1970s a magazine editor asked him for a poem; thinking he might find something to work on, he looked through his notes and 'picked out "February 17th"'.³ Upon editing it, however, in the end he decided to leave it – and therefore all of the entries – in the state he originally wrote them down, with only a few changes to the line breaks.⁴ He subsequently published all of the poems in their raw form, his impulse to do so the product of his personal feelings regarding the 'souvenir bloom' of the originals (*CP*, p. 1205).

Hughes's decision was also informed by other, more literary concerns. In a recording made for the BBC, he provides a further crucial detail regarding the

¹ Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', *Preoccupations*, pp. 41-60 (p. 49).

² Ted Hughes, 'February 17th', *Poetry Archive* <<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/february-17th>> [accessed June 13, 2016], a transcript taken from an introduction to this poem in a recording for the BBC.

³ Hughes, 'Preface' to *Moortown Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989; repr. in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Keegan, pp. 1202-05 (pp. 1205). All further references to prefatory material by Hughes, unless otherwise stated, will be from this edition. The editor was Emma Tennant, who edited the avant-garde publication *Bananas* (1975-79).

⁴ This is confirmed by Roberts, p. 122.

commission. He says that it was not until ‘someone asked [him] for a *pastoral* poem’ that he went back to his diary (emphasis added).⁵ The idea was to ‘tighten [‘February 17th’] up, try to find better words,’ but he soon discovered that in doing so he destroyed ‘the fresh simple presence of the experience’ and so let all the farming poems ‘lie in their rags and tatters’.⁶ It is significant that when Hughes came to adapt his ‘notes’ he found that what he had written would not conform to the ‘pastoral’ mode as requested. It made sense that Hughes turned to his farming material when asked for such a contribution, but it is revealing that the poem in question, the manuscript of ‘February 17th’, did not fit Hughes’s own parameters for the pastoral.⁷ The poem may be in the voice of a shepherd (Hughes himself) but the way in which the poem’s subject matter, a description of a difficult, ultimately unsuccessful and particularly gruesome birth of a lamb, is communicated is in a practical, detailed, and down-to-earth manner not necessarily associated with the tradition of pastoral poetry.

Hughes’s decision to leave the poems, as he puts it, in their ‘rags and tatters’, is suggestive of the alternative ways he represents the farming world. Throughout *Moortown Diary*, he draws on the imagery of ‘tatters’ to describe the situation of farming. In the poem ‘Feeding Out Wintering Cattle at Twilight’, Hughes uses such imagery in a scene in which the farmer/speaker (which it is implied is Hughes himself) is feeding cattle in blustery winter weather: ‘The hay blows luminous tatters from their chewings, a fiery loss, frittering downwind’ (*CP*, p. 506). In the poem ‘A Monument’, he employs the image of a barbed wire fence to act as a memorial to the memory of Jack Orchard, describing the farmer’s ‘raincoat in tatters, face fixed at full effort’ as he constructed it

⁵ Hughes, *Poetry Archive*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ In a letter sent to Daniel Hews in 1958, Hughes describes Thomas Hardy, whom he had recently ‘discovered’, as ‘Preposterous & very novelettish, but completely genuine, & unconscious of literary “mode”’: (*LTH*, p. 135). Hughes’s assessment suggests that he saw this a virtue in Hardy. Indy Clark has shown in a recent study that Hardy was in fact acutely aware of the pastoral tradition and its implications when it comes to representations of rural life: see Indy Clark, *Thomas Hardy’s Pastoral: An Unkindly May* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

(*CP*, p. 534). In these cases, form and content reflect one another: Hughes's 'rags and tatters' in the form of poems represent both the economic and elegiac aspects of small-scale agriculture as he found it and experienced it in the late-twentieth century. The poems themselves may be rough around the edges but when it comes to the survival of the georgic they are, for all their untidiness, 'luminous' with significance.

For Hughes, the modalities of 'February 17th' had to do with its mood. In another recording, he states that his motivation for writing his farming poems more generally was to 'write a whole book of deliberately "upbeat" poems'.⁸ On reflection, however, he found that 'some of them bear the signs of that effort', but he admits that on the whole it is 'extremely difficult to write about the natural world without finding your subject matter turning ugly'.⁹ 'February 17th' is, in his own words, an example of the above difficulty. The poem describes how a 'lamb could not get born' and Hughes's efforts to salvage something from the situation. Introducing the poem at a reading, Hughes explains in detail how 'when a small ewe tries to push out a large lamb, and that lamb fails to get his feet up with his nose [...] the head of the lamb hangs outside the mother, while its shoulders are jammed against her pelvis inside'.¹⁰ When conventional methods fail in such circumstances, he explains, the 'final resort' is as described in the poem.¹¹ It shows how in this instance Hughes travelled

Two miles for the injection and a razor.
Sliced the lamb's throat-strings, levered with a knife

⁸ Ann Skea, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series, Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978.', transcript by Ann Skea, *Ann.Skea.com*, <<http://ann.skea.com/CriticalForum.htm>> [accessed 13 June 2016].

⁹ Hughes, cited in Skea, 'Norwich Tapes'. Hughes did produce a more 'upbeat' collection of poems based on his farming experiences in *Season Songs*, published in 1976. The poems of *Season Songs* feature many of the details that contribute to *Moortown Diary*'s authentic depiction of rural life, but as the collection was originally intended for children it is altogether of a different tone and more optimistic in its outlook than the later sequence. In a letter to Keith Sagar in 1977, Hughes comments upon a manuscript of what was to become 'Moortown Elegies', writing that he intended to put them in a collection 'in spite of their carelessness': 'I would have put more in Season Songs but somehow they are largely downbeat—and I deliberately made Season Songs up-beat, to buck me up. Diaries tend to record downs & disasters anyway': Ted Hughes, '[21 April 1977]', *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar*, ed. by Keith Sagar (London: The British Library, 2012), pp. 55-56. For a consideration of *Season Songs* and *Moortown Diary* together see Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, pp. 193-211.

¹⁰ Hughes, cited in Skea, 'Norwich Tapes'.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Between the vertebrae and brought the head off
To stare at its mother, its pipes sitting in the mud
With all earth for a body.

(*CP*, p. 519)

The poem concludes by describing how the speaker proceeds to pull the headless corpse from the ewe, first by pushing it back inside and then by pulling it out again. The mood and the mode of the poem can be characterised as a push and pull between oppositions: upbeat and downbeat, the symbolic and the mundane, survival and death. The poem's final image – 'And the body lay born, beside the hacked-off head' (*CP*, p. 519) – is a contradiction in itself but also aims to reconcile the above oppositions, to harvest something positive from a 'depressing' situation.

The poem can also be characterised by the dynamic between its more literary and pragmatic elements, manifested in the relation between verse and prose – not only in the sense of the rough-hewn style of the writing itself, but also in the context of the additional prose material added to supplement the poems in *Moortown Diary* in 1989. In the 'Preface', Hughes provides a rationale for the addition of the prose notes at the end of the volume, explaining that he 'added a few sentences of introductory context here and there, as I would if I were reading [the poems] to an audience' (*CP*, p. 1205). The model of 'February 17th', by which Hughes provided an explanation of the details in the poem to audiences at readings, is what he eventually settled on for his farming sequence as a whole.¹² 'February 17th' can be read as an elegy for the dead lamb but it is also at the same time a practical guide for what to do as a farmer when the lambing process goes awry in this way, with Hughes managing to balance the necessary details – 'the injection and a razor' – with the symbolic image of the decapitated head 'with all earth for a body.'

¹² Hughes does not in fact provide any context for 'February 17th' in *Moortown Diary*, but the notes for other poems echo his introductions to poems at readings in terms of content and tone (see chapter II below). For more on Hughes's live readings see Carrie Smith, "'The Ted Hughesness of Ted Hughes': The Construction of a 'Voice' in Hughes's Poetry Readings and Recordings", in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Wormald, Roberts, and Gifford, pp. 205-20.

If 'February 17th' was a staple at readings for Hughes, then it has also been an important piece as far as critics have been concerned.¹³ Indeed, the response to the poem is a testament to its versatility. Neil Roberts comments on how the metaphor of the 'hacked-off head' 'stands out against the background of the detailed, practical narrative' and points out how the uncertainty of whether this is a 'profound or casual observation [...] tempts one to think that this is an artful poem', despite the fact that it is close to a first draft.¹⁴ Regardless of the question of its artfulness, others have also taken a number of different lessons from this particular image. Laura Webb comments on its 'totemic' quality, while Edward Hadley, contrasting 'February 17th' with the 'indifference' of the earlier 'View of a Pig', takes from the image an 'elegiac ecological consolation'.¹⁵ For many commentators, the poem's authenticity is crucial to its symbolism. Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, in an early study, argue that a crucial part of 'our response to the poem is the belief that the writer has had this experience'.¹⁶ Craig Robinson also emphasises the importance of the speaker's (Hughes's) role as shepherd in the poem, arguing that his intervention is 'some kind of *true* involvement' (emphasis added).¹⁷ Twiddy goes a step further still and places the poem's authenticity in the context of a literary tradition in which farming expertise is highly valued: he claims that there is a direct precedent for the poem in Virgil's *Georgics*, especially in Book III, in which the speaker instructs the reader on the care of livestock, and which details, in Iain Twiddy's words, the 'privations, dangers and destructive aspects of farming life'.¹⁸

This chapter argues that the combination of pastoral and georgic elements in the *Moortown Diary* poems derives not only from Hughes's farming years in Devon but also

¹³ In a recent biography of Hughes, Jonathan Bate dismissively claims that 'February 17th' is one of only two poems of any value in *Moortown Diary*, the other being 'Roe-deer': see Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, pp. 319-20. I discuss the poem 'Roe-deer' at length in chapter II.

¹⁴ Roberts, *A Literary Life*, p. 124.

¹⁵ Webb, p. 39; Hadley, p. 73.

¹⁶ Gifford and Roberts, p. 251.

¹⁷ Robinson, 'The Good Shepherd', p. 267.

¹⁸ Twiddy, p. 104.

from his early experiences in South Yorkshire, where he encountered farming first-hand and where, at the same time, he began to write poetry. The style of the Moortown poems also derives from Hughes's exposure to literary critical practices at Cambridge University, where he was an undergraduate. Hughes's reading and writing throughout his career progressed alongside a fascination with animals – initially wild creatures but later more domesticated ones such as cattle. Eager to harness a language suitable for the subject of animal husbandry, Hughes turned to Shakespeare, alongside other writers, in order to channel a style suitable for capturing realities on a farm. The poems of *Moortown Diary* may at first appear spontaneous, but a poetry of animal husbandry was a preoccupation for Hughes long before he even set foot on Moortown Farm. Hughes may not have considered such a language to be specifically georgic, but the following detailed examination of its development in his writing aims to illuminate how he produced poems that can be read in such terms.

A 'workable language'

When the Hughes family moved to Mexborough in South Yorkshire in 1938, an area considerably more built up than Mytholmroyd, Hughes's older brother Gerald discovered a series of farms on his paper round known as Old Denaby. When Gerald left shortly afterwards to become a gamekeeper in Devon, the eight-year old Hughes inherited his brother's unofficial land rights to explore the area (the Hughes brothers' favourite pastime was to trap and shoot wild animals, which for the farmers meant pest control). This area, thanks to its associations for Hughes, proves to be an important location in his development as a poet, especially when it comes to the subjects of agriculture and animals in his work.

Just as Scout Rock loomed over the environment of Mytholmroyd in the Calder Valley, so Old Denaby provided the backdrop to Mexborough and was visible from the

grammar school where Hughes's literary talents were recognised and cultivated. This is where Hughes first encountered a number of his biggest influences, including Gerard Manley Hopkins and D. H. Lawrence; it is also where he studied Virgil in Latin.¹⁹ In short, Hughes's rural and literary identities became entangled at Mexborough and arguably remained so for the rest of his life. As Steve Ely has shown in his monograph on Hughes and South Yorkshire, the farm at the centre of Old Denaby, Manor Farm, is the location of a number of important works including 'The Bull Moses' and 'Sunstroke' from *Lupercal* (1960) and the short stories 'The Harvesting' and 'The Rain Horse' in *Wodwo* (1967).²⁰ 'The Harvesting' is especially pertinent as it is adapted from a short story Hughes first published in the Mexborough Grammar School's literary magazine *Don & Dearne* in 1946.

In 'Sunstroke' and 'The Harvesting', the speakers exhibit an increasingly sympathetic identification with wild creatures: a dead fox in the case of 'Sunstroke' and rabbits and hares in 'The Harvesting'. More significantly, in 'The Bull Moses' and 'The Rain Horse' it is possible to detect a more complex attitude towards, and identification with, domesticated creatures. The depictions of animals in these works may remain a long way from the sensitive handling of vulnerable cattle and sheep in *Moortown Diary*, yet they represent the first stirrings of Hughes's subtle negotiations with the concepts of wildness and cultivation in equal measure. They illustrate how, as he matured, Hughes

¹⁹ According to Keith Sagar, 'Hughes's first acquaintance with the classics would have been at Mexborough Grammar School. He would probably, like his sister two years ahead of him, have been introduced to works by Vergil [sic], Ovid, and Seneca': see Keith Sagar, 'Ted Hughes and the Classics', in *Ted Hughes and the Classics*, ed. by Roger Rees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-24 (p. 2). Elsewhere, Hughes recounts how his 'Latin Master was an intense man with a strong Scots accent, and he loved to pace up and down the room intoning the long hexameter lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*,' before acknowledging: 'I fell without knowing it into Virgil's hexameter – or at least, into fragments of it': see Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, ed. by William Scammell (London: Faber and Faber 1993), p. 9. Unless stated otherwise, all extracts from Hughes's prose are taken from this edition, hereafter *WP*; references will occur in parentheses in the text.

²⁰ Ely, pp. 174-75. The farmer at Manor Farm was Mr Oats, who, as pointed out by Ely, is remembered by Hughes in the poem 'Old Oats' as a figure with a fiery temper and a 'coalface vocabulary | Going up in one flame!' (*CP*, pp. 852-54).

became more and more intrigued, in a literary as well as a professional sense, with livestock.

‘The Bull Moses’ is particularly important when it comes to Hughes’s development as an ‘animal poet’.²¹ As Hughes makes clear in a letter to his sister Olwyn Hughes in 1958 (two years before the publication of *Lupercal*), the creature in the poem is a direct representation of a Mexborough memory as ‘the bull on Oats’ farm over Old Denaby’; it is also, he adds, ‘a creature within the head’, and he claims he got the idea from the Taurus in astrology (*LTH*, p. 125). As an incarnation of a physical animal, the bull is familiar to Hughes and his sister. As a ‘creature within the head’, on the other hand, it exists in an abyss of estrangement. The poem’s speaker looks in at the ‘byre’s | Blaze of darkness’ but the perspective is also a look backwards ‘into the head’ (*CP*, p. 74-75). It recalls how the bull,

[...] too deep in itself to be called to,
Stood in sleep. He would swing his muzzle at a fly
But the square of sky where I hung, shouting, waving,
Was nothing to him; nothing of our light
Found any reflection in him.

(*CP*, p. 74)

No matter how much the speaker tries to attract the beast’s attention by ‘shouting [and] waving’, all attempts at a common language, however rudimentary, fall on deaf ears. To quote John Berger, the bull’s silence ‘guarantees its distance, its distinctness, its exclusion, from and of man’.²² The human world is ‘nothing’ to the bull, with Hughes’s use of the collective possessive ‘our’ reinforcing its status as other. Despite the fact that the bull is ostensibly domesticated, for Hughes it remains in its essence a wild animal. As such, the bull is a mystery for the poet. Indeed, the image of the bull says more about the speaker as an outsider to the farming world than it does about the creature: the

²¹ As Webb observes, ‘Hughes is termed an “animal poet” more readily than almost anything else,’ and with good reason: ‘Across major and minor collections, collections for adults and children, in plays and prose writings, as well as in his occupations outside of literature – fishing, and the environmentalism connected with it, farming, his study of shamanism – animals dominated Hughes’s life’ (Webb, p. 34).

²² John Berger, ‘Why Look at Animals?’, *About Looking* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 1-28 (p. 6).

farmhand/speaker may be ‘nothing’ to the bull, but there is also a lack of identification in human terms – the animal remains an enigma.

If ‘The Bull Moses’ represents an attempt at communication with another species, then it also represents a simplification of Hughes’s own language. As Hughes explains to Olwyn, the poem took ‘a great deal of writing’ and is ‘as bare as it is (i.e. unmetaphorical & without fanciful flights) because it has steadily insisted that I redo to it what in bad translation would look like prose’ (*LTH*, p. 125). In such a sense, the poem contains many of the tensions that come to characterise Hughes’s agricultural poems throughout his career: those between wild and tame, human and animal, farmer and livestock, the real and the imagined, the practical and the spiritual; also, stylistically speaking, the tension between original and translation, poetry and prose, plain writing and metaphorical flights.

Hughes’s exposure to the realities of farming in Mexborough was not limited to the surrounding countryside. The newsagents owned by the Hughes family on Main St. was next door to a butcher’s and, as Ely suggests, it is fair to assume that Hughes would have been witness to the butchery of animals across the alleyway between the two properties.²³ In ‘View of Pig’, also from *Lupercal*, a poem which according to Ely is based on such experiences, the animal’s status as a carcass once again inhibits identification in the mind of the speaker. As ‘the pig [lies] on the barrow dead,’ all the speaker can manage is to comment upon its mass:

Such weight and thick pink bulk
Set in death seemed not just dead.
It was less than lifeless, further off.
It was like a sack of wheat.
(*CP*, p. 75-76)

Spoken entirely in the past tense, each and every one of the poem’s nine four-line stanzas ends with a full stop. It can therefore be interpreted as a full stop on the animal’s life: the pig is now merely identified by its consumable parts, as ‘just so much | a poundage of lard

²³ Ely, p. 174.

and pork' (*CP*, p. 76). Various different kinds of acoustic repetition create a sense of proportion, not just in terms of size but also in terms of just what the pig's existence has amounted to. The assonance of 'thick pink bulk' combines with alliteration of the consonants to bring the stresses down *smack* on each word, verbally enacting how its hide is 'thumped [...] without remorse' by the speaker (*CP*, p. 76). The echo of these notes in 'sack' package the sense that the pig has well and truly been harvested, compounded by the half-rhyme of 'weight' in 'wheat'. The pig is 'less than lifeless', merely an object or even an inconvenience – 'how could it be moved? | And the trouble of cutting it up' (*CP*, p. 76), the speaker goes on to observe. Even at such close quarters, there is an irreconcilable and irrevocable distance between the onlooker and the pig; it is 'too dead' for empathy and therefore 'further off'.

Writing to Anne-Lorraine Bujon in 1992, Hughes traces the development of his own style of writing from his first collection *The Hawk in the Rain* to the esoteric *Gaudete*, and in so doing provides a powerful account of how his poetic style is tied to his perceptions of animals. In Hughes's eyes, 'View of a Pig' was a crucial poem in the modelling of what he refers to as 'my workable language' (*LTH*, p. 630): he explains how following the publication of *The Hawk in the Rain*, his 'conscious search for a "solid" irrefutably defined basic (and therefore "limited") kit of words drew [him] inevitably towards the solid irrefutably defined basic kit of [his] experiences—drew [him] towards animals' (*LTH*, p. 630).

Hughes had written about various creatures in his first collection; the difference with 'View of a Pig' was that the animal in question was not only a cultivated and domesticated creature but was dead and in the process of being harvested. For Hughes, the pig's dead weight is what determined his use of language in the poem:

the actuality of the pig was (in a sense that was almost conscious to me) the image of what I wanted each word in the poem to be [...] So I had found a language—only, by locating it in its lifeless (or comatose, anaesthetised) obedience.

(*LTH*, p. 620-21)

Paul Bentley refers to the carcass in ‘View of a Pig’ as both physically and empathetically “*intractable*”: it cannot be “moved” within or by language’.²⁴ Indeed, the speaker of the poem is equally unmoved in emotional terms, with Hughes’s objective stance and matter-of-fact tone engendering a cold and cruel attitude towards the treatment of the pig: ‘Too dead now to pity’; ‘They were going to scald it, | Scald it and scour it like a doorstep’ (*CP*, p. 76). In such a sense, Hughes’s poetic ‘kit’ is the equivalent to a butcher’s ‘basic kit’ of instruments and knives.

Old Denaby, and Hughes’s exposure to agricultural life there, remained important to Hughes, even if the poems which arose from that environment form a contrast to his later, more involved experiences in Devon. Much later, Hughes’s literary life continued to be informed and shaped by his feelings towards keeping and killing animals. Both ‘View of a Pig’ and ‘Bull Moses’ represent the beginning of an association in Hughes between animal husbandry on the one hand and the cultivation of verse forms on the other, an association that eventually gives rise to dramatically more sympathetic representations of livestock in *Moortown Diary*. In the letter to Bujon, Hughes describes how he composed the poems of his first book by ‘trying to write poems for the way I read them’ (*LTH*, p. 629). Hughes’s reading is related to his writing; so too are these activities related to his thoughts on farming. In order to fully appreciate the style of animal husbandry poems in *Moortown Diary*, therefore, it is necessary to review Hughes’s exposure to alternative methods of reading and writing during the course of his education.

²⁴ Paul Bentley, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion and Beyond* (Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), p. 19.

‘Sympathetic husbandry’

In 1948, with the aid of his mentor at Mexborough Grammar School, John Fisher, Hughes was granted an exhibition to study English at Cambridge, taking up his place in 1951 after two years of national service. Hughes may not have remembered his experiences at Cambridge as fondly or as formatively as his time spent exploring the countryside in Yorkshire, but Cambridge came to have a profound effect on his literary as well as his rural consciousness.²⁵ Agriculture was certainly not at the centre of Hughes’s university years, but if his recollections of the period are to be believed, it continued to mould his conflicted feelings about raising livestock, and this was especially true when it came to the symbolic connection he formed regarding creative writing, education and animals.

In 1953, in his final year, Hughes went through a crisis of identity, dropping English Literature in favour of Archaeology and Anthropology. His account of his decision is enigmatically communicated in the short prose piece ‘The Burnt Fox’, first published in 1994. In the piece, Hughes describes himself sitting at his desk at night trying to write a literary essay. Eventually he gives up and goes to bed, only to dream that he is visited by a burning half-man/half-fox figure:

Then it spread its hand – a human hand as I now saw, but burning and bleeding like the rest of him – flat palm down on the blank space of my page. At the same time it said: ‘Stop this – you are destroying us.’ Then as it lifted its hand away I saw the blood-print, like a palmist’s specimen, with all the lines and creases, in wet, glistening blood on the page.

(*WP*, p. 9)

Despite Hughes’s claim that he experienced this dream in Cambridge, the anecdote was not published in this form until the 1990s, although he does refer to it in a letter to Keith Sagar in 1979 (*LTH*, p. 422-23). In both cases, the dream is a story that he tells in retrospect. Whether or not Hughes actually experienced this vision is not important; what

²⁵ For more on how Cambridge had a positive on Hughes’s writing, see Neil Roberts, ‘Ted Hughes and Cambridge,’ in Wormald, Roberts, and Gifford, pp. 17-32, and Yvonne Reddick, ‘Throttle College’?: Ted Hughes’s Cambridge Poetry’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 44.3 (1 September 2015), 213-32.

is key is that Hughes interprets his decision to switch subject, and his relationship with literary studies more generally, as connected to his treatment of animals.

In the letter to Sagar, Hughes explains how anthropology offered an alternative way of interpreting poetry from the 'Leavis style dismantling of texts' he describes experiencing while partaking in the English Tripos at Cambridge. Although Hughes found he had an aptitude for such practices, he also felt that this style of analysis fundamentally 'separated the spirit of surgery & objective analysis from the spirit of husbandry & sympathetic coaching' (*LTH*, p. 423).²⁶ It is remarkable that Hughes sources a language associated with the care of animals and husbandry to describe a form of 'sympathetic' criticism by which the poem is treated as living, breathing organism – the term *animal*, after all, is derived from the Latin *animalis*, meaning 'having breath'.

'The living parts are the words, the images, the rhythms. The spirit is the life which inhabits them when they all work together,' explains Hughes in his own sympathetic verse-writing manual for teachers and children, *Poetry in the Making* (1967).²⁷ Hughes constructs various analogies over the course of the book between thinking, reading, and writing (especially about animals) and the practices of hunting and fishing. If Hughes had previously located his language by finding it in its 'lifeless [...] obedience', then in *Poetry in the Making*, by contrast, his emphasis is on how the words are 'living parts', animated by the life which inhabits them when they all '*work together*' (emphasis added). Here, Hughes is commenting on his poem 'The Thought Fox', which is related to the prose story 'The Burnt Fox', a poem that confirms Hughes's own faith in

²⁶ As evocative as this sounds, Hughes may well have been making a false distinction between the influence of Leavis on literary studies and the freedom he discovered in anthropology in this regard. Roberts remembers Leavis himself encouraging students to transfer to Archaeology and Anthropology in the name of broadening their knowledge, while Stefan Collini states that the one discipline other than literary criticism that was heavily colonised by Leavisites in the mid-twentieth century was Anthropology: see Roberts, 'Ted Hughes and Cambridge', p. 19, and Stefan Collini, 'The Literary Critic and the Village Labourer: "Culture" in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Prothero Lecture', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 14 (2004), 93-116 (p. 113). Nonetheless, this should not distract from the way Hughes claims he remembers it. Upon closer inspection, the opposition he conjures up between the two ways of reading verse has as much to do with animals and with agriculture as it does with Anthropology.

²⁷ Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967; repr. 2008), p. 17.

his writerly instincts. Yet such comments on wild animals can also be applied to his attitude towards livestock. Hughes's 'workable language', as it developed, came to have less to do with lifelessness than the nurturing of animal life.

The trauma of the English Tripos at Cambridge had a lasting impact on Hughes, the reverberations of which are detectable throughout his reminiscences of the period. What is particularly striking is that Hughes repeatedly interprets the environment at Cambridge in agricultural terms.²⁸ In an undated diary entry made in either 1973 or 74, during the period he was farming in Devon, Hughes experiences another animal dream set in Cambridge. The difference this time is that Hughes is not a student but a farmer. He records how on the night of the dream he had to be up early the next day in order to feed and load some livestock for sale at a market: the potential sale of '20 bullocks—19 plus Candy the heifer—our entire first year calving, in other words, except for Beowulf slaughtered'.²⁹ That night, writes Hughes, he dreams of himself and Carol Hughes

herding the cattle into a square behind St Johns, in Cambridge. Beowulf leaped the barrier + made off towards some cows. We detoured around the college to cut him off, running in our boots, with our sticks, among the students in gowns + the dons pressing towards morning lectures.³⁰

That Hughes's dream about the sale and slaughter of his cattle is set in Cambridge is just one of the ways in which his concerns and anxieties surrounding education are related to his feelings about animal husbandry. It should come as no surprise that one of Hughes's prize cattle, the one he saved from slaughter, and the one who rebels at Cambridge, is called 'Beowulf', especially considering that at Cambridge (as opposed to at Oxford) *Beowulf* is studied as part of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic studies, not English.³¹

²⁸ Not long after his graduation, Hughes had an idea, giving rise to a telling pun, to 'buy a house in Oxford or Cambridge & farm it out to students' (*LTH*, p. 31).

²⁹ Ted Hughes, 'Diary Entries', 1 folder, London, British Library, Edward James Hughes Papers, ADD Ms. 88918/128/5.

³⁰ Hughes, 'Diary Entries', British Library, ADD Ms. 88918/128/5.

³¹ In a review of Seamus Heaney's 1999 translation of *Beowulf*, Terry Eagleton makes the point that there is a geographical dimension to considering *Beowulf* as part of the 'English' tradition: 'roughly speaking', he argues, 'the nearer you approach the Arctic Circle, the more authentic your language grows. Northern poems – from *Beowulf* and Ted Hughes's *The Hawk in the Rain* to Seamus Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* – are craggy and brawny, whereas southern ones are more devious and deliquescent': see Terry

The dream suggests that, for Hughes, Cambridge as an educational facility functions for writing talent as a slaughterhouse does for livestock. Responding later in his life to an unfavourable review of his extended prose work *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992), Hughes laments what he saw as the damaging effect of literary studies on young writers: ‘every year’, he writes, ‘I watch the march past of these little stars, all bursting with hope—hurrying excitedly off to read English according to their natural bent and their utter ignorance of what is waiting for them in those abattoirs.’³² In order to fully appreciate the degree to which such associations are given life in the poems, it is first necessary to examine Hughes’s relationship with another giant of the literary canon: Shakespeare. For, as it turns out, Hughes’s admiration for Shakespeare is intimately connected to his views regarding creative writing, education, and the treatment of animals.

‘A utility general-purpose style’

In 1971, the year prior to the purchase of Moortown Farm, Hughes published an edited volume *A Choice of Shakespeare’s Verse*. In his introduction, he traces out what he refers to as the ‘great theme’ of Shakespeare’s works, an argument he would later develop in detail in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*. Hughes begins, in this case, with a number of paragraphs explaining the motivation behind his choice of passages from the plays. These, he explains, had to do with ‘liberat[ing] something in the activity of the language’ at the cost of ‘lessen[ing] their poetry’ (*WP*, p. 104).

Eagleton, ‘Hasped and Hooped and Hirpling’, a review of *Beowulf*, trans. by Seamus Heaney (1999), *London Review of Books*, 21.22 (11 November 1999), 15–16, p. 15. While it is unclear if Eagleton is mocking or endorsing this over-simplified characterisation of a literary North/South divide, the evidence suggests that Hughes’s northern roots turned out to be more easily transferrable to rural Devon than to Cambridge.

³² The reviewer was Eric Griffiths, a Fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge, who characterises Hughes as a ‘cultural peasant in search of miracles’: Eric Griffiths, ‘Blasted With Ecstasy’, a review of Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992), *Times*, 09 April 1992, p. 5. In a letter to Derwent May in 1992, Hughes describes Griffiths in turn as someone who is ‘straitjacketed inside the English Tripos’ (*LTH*, p. 603).

Fallen from the visionary world of the play, [the passages] have to make their meaning out of the rubbish-heap and more or less chaotic half-digested turnover of experience, the flux of half-memories and broken glimpses, in their reader at the moment of reading

(*WP*, p. 103).

Hughes's comments on a major influence, in this case Shakespeare, reveal as much about his own ways of working as they do about his reading. His particular admiration for Shakespeare's language comes down to the fact that it has 'the air of being invented in a state of crisis, for a terribly urgent job' and how at times it resembles 'a homely spur of the moment improvisation out of whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying around' (*WP*, p. 105).³³ The pressures that Shakespeare appears to have been under as a writer – at least in Hughes's impression – are emphasised for the reader when passages are removed from their context. Just as Shakespeare improvised out of 'verbal scraps', so too does any reader of Hughes's selections – according to his own estimations – have to 'make their meaning out of the rubbish heap' of experience at the moment of reading.³⁴

Hughes's intimate knowledge of Shakespeare's language meant that he was predisposed to emulate it, but there was also the question of finding the right subject matter to do justice to this brand of 'improvised' verse. In the 'Preface' to *Moortown Diary*, Hughes provides an explanation for the 'form and style' of the poems in terms that share their tone with his introduction to Shakespeare: 'I set them down in what appears to be verse for a simple reason,' he states, 'making a note about anything, if I wish to look

³³ Hughes's praise of Shakespeare's language recalls Wordsworth's famous statement in the introduction to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings': William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 741-60 (p. 744). As Angela Esterhammer has shown, Romantic theories of spontaneity were related to traditions of poetic improvisation in Italy, specifically *improvvisatori* poetic performances, a theatrical form, she explains, 'that bears a certain resemblance to modern "improv" or poetry slams': see Angela Esterhammer, 'Spontaneity, Immediacy, and Improvisation in Romantic Poetry', in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Charles Mahoney (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 321-36 (p. 322): see also Angela Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁴ Reviewing Hughes's *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* in 1992, Griffiths points out, inaccurately, that most of the passages in what he counts as Hughes's earlier 'mis-titled' *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* are in fact prose (Griffiths, p. 5). For Hughes, this would have been a positive point, for in his mind the best poetry is never far from a certain kind of prose: 'real speech' (*WP*, p. 105).

closely I find I can move closer, and stay closer, if I phrase my observations about it in rough lines' (*CP*, p. 1205).³⁵ When Hughes states in his introduction to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* that he selected only from the 'top pressure poetry', which also (seemingly paradoxically) has the air of 'wild, home-made poetry' (*WP*, p. 104), he is in fact describing qualities that just as easily apply to his own farming poems, which he refers to elsewhere in his 'Preface' in similar terms as 'old home movie[s]' (*CP*, p. 1205), as if they too were 'home-made'.

In a note added to the *Moortown* poem 'A Monument' in 1989, Hughes describes his father-in-law, the farmer Jack Orchard, in terms that echo his championing of Shakespeare:

Farmers make especially valuable soldiers, I have read, because they are skilled in so many different ways. Jack Orchard belonged to a tradition of farmers who seem equal to any job, any crisis, using the most primitive means, adapting and improvising with any old bit of metal, and the more massive the physical demand, the more novel the engineering problem, the more intricate the mechanical difficulty, the better; and preferably the operation should be submerged under the worst possible weather.

(*CP*, p. 1210)

If Shakespeare's language has 'the air of being invented in a state of crisis, for a terribly urgent job', then, for Hughes, that job could alternatively be farming.³⁶ According to Hughes, Shakespeare made up his verse out of 'whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying

³⁵ In a lecture on Hughes delivered in 2005, Alice Oswald argues that Hughes's farming poems come to resemble a style akin to documentary or the jottings of a journalist: the poems, she proposes, should be read in a theatrical context, as opposed to one that is literary. Pointing out that in the year the trade edition of the farming sequence first appeared 'Faber had published *Impro* [1979], a book by Keith Johnstone about spontaneity in the theatre', Oswald compares the sequence to the style of Hughes's numerous play translations: 'very swift and bright and urgent and speakable': see Oswald, 'Wild Things'; the article is an edited extract from the lecture. In *Impro*, Johnstone advises the use of verse writing to open up the possibility for spontaneity in acting rehearsals: see Keith Johnstone, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), pp. 104-05, 121-23.

³⁶ In *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, Hughes himself makes the connection between Shakespeare and agriculture. In a parenthetical remark added late to a footnote, he proposes that as 'a country boy, and the nephew of several farmers, Shakespeare enjoyed a familiarity with pigs that is not irrelevant to his myth. The imagination's symbols are based on subliminal perception': Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 11. Hughes added the footnote at the last minute, just a few months before writing to Bujon regarding his own familiarity with pigs in similar quasi-mythical terms. Shakespeare's familiarity with pigs may itself be a myth but this matters not for Hughes, whose own 'imagination's symbols are based on subliminal perception': see Jonathan Bate, 'Hughes and Shakespeare', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 135-149 (p. 143).

around’ and so too does Hughes describe one of the requirements of the farmer as being able to improvise gathered materials: ‘any old bit of metal’. The point is that farmers appreciate the need for improvisation as much as any writer.

The reference to farmers as soldiers in the note to ‘A Monument’ is suggestive of another, key literary influence behind *Moortown Diary*. In 1964, Hughes published another edited selection of the work of the Second World War poet Keith Douglas.³⁷ Hughes’s introduction to Douglas shows that his appreciation of the poet had much in common with, and was connected to, his admiration for Shakespeare. Hughes writes that Douglas’s triumph ‘lies in the way he renews the simplicity of ordinary talk’:

There is nothing studied about this new language. Its air of improvisation is a vital part of its purity. It has the trenchancy of an inspired jotting, yet leaves no doubt about the completeness and subtlety of his impressions, or the thoroughness of his artistic conscience. The poem titled ‘Egypt’, for instance, could be diary note, yet how could it be improved as a poem?

[...] It is a language for the whole mind, at its most wakeful, and in all situations. A utility general-purpose style, as, for instance, Shakespeare’s was, that combines a colloquial prose readiness with poetic breadth, a ritual intensity and music of an exceedingly high order with clear direct feeling, and yet in the end is nothing but casual speech.

(WP, pp. 214-15)

Again, there is the impression that Hughes’s admiration for Douglas lies not in the idea that the poetry it is in itself casual but in the fact that it appears so. He praises its ‘*air* of improvisation’ (emphasis added) rather than the act of improvising itself; he highlights how there is ‘nothing studied’ about the language but at the same time lauds the ‘completeness and thoroughness’ of the finished poems. As with Shakespeare, it is his studied casualness that warrants Douglas’s appeal – the idea that a poem may resemble a diary note and yet also be perfect as a poem.

In 1988, the year before he published *Moortown Diary* with an additional preface and notes, Hughes wrote a letter to William Scammell, who at the time was in the process

³⁷ Keith Douglas, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).

of preparing a critical study of Douglas. He poses the question: ‘how did [Douglas] manage to make such final and in their way archetypal and manifestly indestructible designs sound so spontaneous, so much like the thought of the moment?’ (*LTH*, p. 543). He praises Douglas’s ‘documentary bent’ before adding that the ‘versified journal entries or diary jottings that I know (like my pieces about farm animals) seem to me to confine themselves to a lower order of poetic possibility’ (*LTH*, p. 543-4). Despite the fact that Hughes talks down the ‘poetic possibility’ of the rougher examples of Douglas’s writings, as well as his own, the subject of a ‘thought of the moment’ style was a preoccupation of his from the period preceding to long after he experimented with the style himself in his farming poems. By channelling the influence of Shakespeare and Douglas, Hughes achieves – whether by his own admission or not – his aspiration of emulating their ‘utility general-purpose style’.

In his 1989 ‘Preface’, Hughes explains the origin of the *Moortown Diary* poems: ‘the pieces in this collection came about by the way’ (*CP*, p. 1204). While he was working on the farm, it occurred to Hughes that he ought to make a note of events as they happened, ‘a note of the details in particular, partly with the idea of maybe using them at some future time in a piece of writing’ (*CP*, p. 1204).³⁸ The suggestion here is that any ‘note’ was – at least initially – incidental and therefore subordinate and preliminary to any future poem, or *real* ‘piece of writing’. Yet Hughes’s use of qualifiers (‘partly’, ‘maybe’) complicates this idea and suggests that the notes had at least some value in their

³⁸ Another possible source of influence for Hughes’s documentary style in *Moortown Diary* is Frank O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems* (1964), made up of pieces O’Hara composed spontaneously during his lunch hour working in New York. Susan B. Rosenbaum writes about O’Hara’s desire ‘to preserve the spontaneity of the work; rather than define his writing as a profession, and his poems as products to be bought or sold, he defined poetry as an extension of his poetic experience’: see *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), p. 73. As Hughes recounts in his ‘Preface’, when he came to edit his original diary entries into more refined (and therefore marketable) versions, he found himself ‘in the position of the translator’: ‘altering any word felt like retouching an old home movie with new bits of fake-original voice and fake-original actions’ (*CP*, p. 1205). For more on spontaneity in modern American poetry see Aaron Lehman, *Accidental Modernism: Spontaneity and Design in Modern American Poetry* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Rochester, 2010), and Joel Nickels, *The Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

own right, as ‘fleeting snapshots’ of a ‘precious’ bit of his life (*CP*, p. 1204). What his account does make clear is that these notes were subordinate to the act of farming itself: the ‘impulse’ came to him, he states, about forty times, which is perhaps not as often as might be expected (*CP*, p. 1204).³⁹

Hughes’s former editor at Faber, and editor of his letters, Christopher Reid, argues that Hughes’s final collection *Birthday Letters* (1998) represents ‘intimate speech raised to the level of art’ (*LTH*, pp. xv). In his farming poems, following the examples of Shakespeare and Douglas, Hughes raises ‘casual speech’ to the level of art. Commenting on the poems, Hughes refers to them as ‘what appears to be verse’, as ‘rough lines’, ‘improvised verses’ and ‘casual journal notes’ (*CP*, p. 1205). Even when writing in 1989, over a decade after they were first drafted, he seems reluctant to call them poems; and this appears to be precisely why he placed such value upon them. Hughes describes how when writing each one he tried to exclude ‘the poetic process, the process of memory’ primarily by setting the words down on paper as soon as possible after the event (*CP*, p. 1205). The results may have been ‘rough’, ‘improvised’ and ‘casual’ but they were, after all, authentic: a ‘video and surviving voice-track’ of his farming days (*CP*, p. 1205).

What Hughes found in the work Shakespeare and Douglas, then, was a language appropriate for capturing the haphazard realities of farming. David Sergeant observes that for all their untidiness, Hughes’s *Moortown Diary* poems do not lack art. The key factor in this contradiction of style, for Sergeant, is Hughes’s intimacy with Shakespeare. He argues that ‘Hughes’s knew his Shakespeare by heart, and the off-the-cuff, expository mode of the *Moortown* poems is as close as he came to rechanneling Shakespearean blank verse.’⁴⁰ More than this, Sergeant highlights how ‘the poems in *Moortown Diary* rejoice in a superabundance of poetic invention’: ‘Alliteration, assonance, consonance,

³⁹ If Hughes is to be believed, nearly all of the originals were eventually published (*CP*, p. 1204). This is even more remarkable given that they appear almost entirely unedited from the spontaneous first draft, a fact confirmed by Roberts in *A Literary Life* (p. 122).

⁴⁰ Sergeant.

rhythm, internal and half-rhyme, all temper and bind lines which are of a reasonably regular length, for the most part, and feature densely compressed, multidirectional imagery'.⁴¹ In *Moortown Diary*, Hughes is emulating Shakespeare and Douglas, but in order to echo them further he is also ceaselessly inventing.⁴²

It is in his similes and yoking of images that the full extent of Hughes's inventiveness in *Moortown Diary* comes to the fore. The eyes of injected cattle in 'Dehorning', for example, are 'Like a live eye caught in a pan, like the eye of a fish | Imprisoned in air' (*CP*, p. 504). Often Hughes reaches for one comparison after another in quick succession, risking the chance of mixing his imagery for the payoff of exactly the right blend of sensations. Sometimes the juxtapositions are surprising: overgrown brambles are 'like an abandoned scrapyard' in 'Rain' (*CP*, p. 504), and lambs in snow are 'imperishable | Like trawlers, bobbing in gangs' in 'Couples under cover' (*CP*, p. 514). Hughes puts it best himself in a poem called 'Surprise' in which the poet watches a cow give birth and remarks how 'Crazily far thoughts | Proposed themselves as natural' (*CP*, p. 515). Like most of the poems in the sequence, 'Surprise' begins out of the blue, with the speaker watching the cows in 'their high-roofy roomy | Windy home, mid-afternoon idling' (*CP*, p. 514).⁴³

Suddenly
The apron slithered, and a whole calf's
Buttocks and hind-legs – whose head and forefeet
Had been hidden from me by another cow –
Topped out of its mother, and collapsed on the ground.
Leisurely, as she might be leisurely curious,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² For John Bayley, writing in the *London Review of Books*, Hughes's achievement in his farming poems is 'an apparently casual performance that could only come from a poet steeped in his own great talent to the point of taking it for granted', adding that Hughes's language 'seems exactly equal to the task – as if to tractoring, milking, mucking out, performing these jobs with the wholly effective absence of enthusiasm which for a countryman often seems the nearest thing to enjoyment': see John Bayley, 'Facts and Making', a review of Ted Hughes, *Moortown* (1979), Thom Gunn, *Selected Poems 1955-1975* (1980), and W. S. Graham, *Collected Poems 1942-1977* (1980), *London Review of Books* 2.3 (21 February 1980), 14-15 (p. 14).

⁴³ I am not ignorant of the influence of Gerard Manley Hopkins in these lines. Hughes had been introduced to Hopkins's poems at Mexborough Grammar School by Fisher, and, alongside the poems of T. S. Eliot, '[he] recognized in these something [he] very much wanted, and set about taking possession of both' (*WP*, p. 6).

She turned, pulling her streamers of blood-tissue
 Away from the lumpish jetsam. She nosed it
 Where it lay like a still-birth in its tissues.
 She began to nibble and lick. The jelly
 Shook its head and nosed the air. She gave it
 The short small swallowed moo-grunts hungry cows
 Give when they stand suddenly among plenty.
 (CP, p. 515)

In the optical illusion of the anthropoid image of the apron, Hughes witnesses his own reflection, as the barriers that separate the human and the animal ‘collapse’ in the wake of familiarity. The calf’s delivery is both profound and bathetic, part of the everyday rhythm of the agricultural life-cycle. In this poem, and throughout the sequence, Hughes’s conceits are not always what Samuel Johnson would refer to as ‘a *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar, or occult resemblances in things apparently unlike’.⁴⁴ Rather, there is the sense that only a farmer intimate with the subject would make such an association. Hughes compares one type of ‘moo-grunt’ to another, and elsewhere, in the poem ‘Ravens’, he describes a dead-born lamb’s never-used hooves ‘as soft as dogs’ pads’ (CP, p. 517).

In *Moortown Diary*, Hughes’s ideas are not, in the words of Johnson, ‘yoked by violence together’, but instead arise out of a farmer’s sense of care and custodianship over the creature or thing being described.⁴⁵ This is combined with another, more objective perspective, which is the poet’s concern for the poem. Indeed, Hughes is more likely to ‘yoke’ his ideas in the original agricultural sense of the term, harnessing a pair of related images and coaxing them into doing the line’s work. On the subject of metaphor, Sarah Kennedy remarks that ‘without access to some source of animating dissimilitude, the poet’s literary offspring is stillborn’:

‘Metaphor’ draws its etymology from the processes of translation and transferral. The Greek ‘meta’ (over) combines with ‘pherein’ (‘to carry, to bear’) becoming

⁴⁴ Samuel Johnson, ‘Cowley’, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), I, pp. 191-234 (p. 200). Hughes had read *The Lives of the Poets* at Cambridge and it was while trying to write an essay on Johnson that he allegedly experienced the ‘Burnt Fox’ dream (*LTH*, pp. 76, 422).

⁴⁵ Johnson, ‘Cowley’, p. 200.

metaphora ('to carry across, to transfer'). It is the *anima* of the transformation of experience into language[.]⁴⁶

Earlier, in 'The Bull Moses', Hughes had deliberately omitted metaphors and 'fanciful flights', and likewise in 'View of a Pig' the 'actuality of the pig' meant that Hughes's language was itself 'lifeless' and matter-of-fact. In his farming poems from the 1970s, however, written while Hughes was himself raising livestock, the animals he represents, through often dead or dying, are presented as full of life. This Hughes achieves by giving himself licence to reach for wild and unusual comparisons, trusting his instincts in the moment of composition the same way he perceived Shakespeare and Douglas to have done.⁴⁷

According to T. S. Eliot, metaphor is 'the life of style, of language,' and the same appears to have been the case for Hughes, not only in his interpretation of Shakespeare and Douglas, but in the *Moortown Diary* poems themselves.⁴⁸ In a 'Note' to a 1991 reprint of *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*, based on his earlier 'introduction', Hughes describes Shakespeare's language in terms of 'something being hurled together', 'snatched and grabbed out of the listener's ears, his shirt front, his top-pocket', adding 'this sort of thing is part of the kit of all poetic medicine bags'.⁴⁹ Here, Hughes's poetic kit, previously associated in the context of 'View of a Pig' with a butcher's kit of knives, is now a 'poetic medicine' kit, with the emphasis being on keeping multiple registers

⁴⁶ Sarah Kennedy, *T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1, 3. Kennedy's animating principle is informed both by Eliot's assertion that 'the *healthy* metaphor adds to the strength of the language; it makes available some of that physical source of energy upon which the *life* of language depends' (emphasis added), and David Punter's observation that any metaphor 'brings something into being': see T. S. Eliot, 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Roger Schuchard and others, 8 vols (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014—), I: *Apprentice Years, 1905-1918*, ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker and Roger Schuchard (2014), pp. 760-63 (p. 762), and David Punter, *Metaphor* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 21. See also George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1980, repr. 2003).

⁴⁷ As Carol Hughes and the Ted Hughes Estate confirmed in a letter to the author, Hughes would often write down details of events at Moortown and Mannings Fields as they happened: Carol Hughes, Letter to Jack Thacker, 16 May 2016.

⁴⁸ Eliot, 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism', p. 762. For Eliot's influence on Hughes see Roger Schuchard, 'T. S. Eliot and Ted Hughes: Shamanic Possession', *South Atlantic Review*, 76.3 (Summer 2011), 51-73.

⁴⁹ Ted Hughes, *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. 172-4, 195.

alive in the language.⁵⁰ Emphasising Shakespeare's 'cross breeding' of English and the 'accidental poetic result' (emphasis in original), Hughes inadvertently describes the result of his efforts on the page and on the farm.⁵¹ In *Moortown Diary*, the 'cross breeding' of Hughes's imagery gives rise to poems written that transfer the 'anima' of experience onto the page, specifically the experience of raising animals. Part of this experience, however, involves their slaughter, for, as testified in 'February 17th', things rarely go as smoothly for the farmer as they do in 'Surprise'. It is the uncomfortable truths that lie behind Hughes's animal husbandry poems with which this chapter concludes.

The Animal Crush

In J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Elizabeth Costello conducts a seminar on Hughes's poem 'The Jaguar' (from *The Hawk in the Rain*) and on the idea of 'poetry that does not try to find an idea of the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him.'⁵² Halfway through the seminar, she is confronted with a question:

Someone else has his hand up: a tall young man with glasses. He doesn't know Ted Hughes's poetry well, he says, but the last he heard, Hughes was running a sheep-ranch somewhere in England. Either he is just raising sheep as poetic subjects (there is a titter around the room) or he is a real rancher raising sheep for the market. 'How does this square with what you were saying in your lecture

⁵⁰ This characterisation of Shakespeare's language echoes the rationale behind Hughes's collaboration with Seamus Heaney in the poetic anthology *The Rattle Bag*. Introducing their anthology, Heaney and Hughes discuss how the volume 'amassed itself like a cairn', and write of their hope that their decision 'to impose an arbitrary alphabetical order allows the contents to discover themselves as [they themselves] gradually discovered them—each poem full of its singular appeal, transmitting its own signals, taking its chances in a big, voluble world': see *The Rattle Bag*, ed. by Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 19. The term 'rattle bag' is taken from a poem in the anthology by Dafydd Ap Gwilym, 'The Rattle Bag', translated from the Welsh by Joseph Clancy (pp. 354-55), and describes a rattle consisting of a bag filled with pellets or stones, sometimes used to attract deer in hunting (*OED*). In 1997, Hughes produced another anthology with Heaney, *The School Bag*, this time ordered thematically with more of an educational focus.

⁵¹ Hughes, *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*, p. 184.

⁵² J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, ed. by, Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 51.

yesterday, when you seemed to be pretty much against killing animals for meat?’⁵³

The fictional scenario in Coetzee’s narrative highlights a very real issue surrounding Hughes’s work: is it possible to reconcile the ‘sympathetic husbandry’ of Hughes’s poetry with his role as a farmer complicit in the slaughter of animals? ‘I’ve never met Ted Hughes’, replies Costello, ‘so I can’t tell you what kind of farmer he is.’⁵⁴ To answer the question, she returns to ‘The Jaguar’, highlighting Hughes’s ‘primitivism’ and how his poetry ‘shows us how to bring the living body into being within ourselves’.⁵⁵ Hughes’s primitivism aside, the young man’s interpolation has implications too for *Moortown Diary*, ones that remain unaddressed by Costello. For instance, what exactly is to be made of the fact that Hughes was both a farmer of animals and a farmer of poems? Coetzee imagines the audience of Costello’s seminar humoured by the notion of ‘raising [animals] as poetic subjects’ but the distinction to be made between poet and farmer in Hughes becomes a way to address a number of serious debates, including vegetarianism and the role of ecocriticism.

For Hughes, the writing process and the agricultural process were analogous; his desire to leave the poems of the Moortown sequence unedited is not disconnected from the fact that the animals represented in the poems are immortalised alive on the farm – they are, on the page at least, spared the fate of real farm animals. Despite this, as Leonard M. Scigaj reminds us, the reader remains all the time aware of the undeniable fact behind the poems that the cattle and sheep are being cultivated for human consumption.⁵⁶ As the writer of the poems as well as the farmer of the animals, Hughes

⁵³ Coetzee, p. 51-52.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 51.

⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 52-53. For more on Hughes’s Jaguar poems see Michael Malay, ‘Ted Hughes: Another Look at the Jaguar’, *Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 4.1 (2014), 89-100.

⁵⁶ Leonard M. Scigaj, ‘Ted Hughes and Ecology: A Biocentric Vision’, in *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, ed. Keith Sagar (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp 160-81 (p. 170); Susanna Lidström, *Nature, Environment and Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Poetics of Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 142.

was also aware of this fact. He may not have chosen to represent the realities of the slaughterhouse in his poetry but elsewhere he made no effort to conceal the more unpleasant aspects of farming livestock.

Hughes's early poems about wild animals are often characterised by scenes of violence (see 'Thrushes', for example, from *Lupercal*), but in a late essay entitled 'Poetry and Violence' he comments upon how negative reactions to hunting and killing in the natural world are 'burdened by the fact that most of us continue to survive only by devouring parts of several different dead animals each week – and often enough each day,' adding that 'these are animals that have to be killed by methods and in circumstances that make any wild predator's kill seem by comparison merciful and blameless' (*WP*, p. 256).⁵⁷ Hughes was no vegetarian himself and by raising livestock was complicit in the process he describes and laments above.⁵⁸ Yet his sympathy for animals was not necessarily in conflict with his role as a farmer, as he was not opposed to the practice of raising livestock in itself, but specifically against industrialised methods of production and slaughter.

In *Moortown Diary*, Hughes's focus is almost solely on cultivation. He writes in the note to 'Little Red Twin' that the bulk of the poems 'concern the nursing if not the emergency hospital side of animal husbandry,' before making the observation that the 'farmer's impression' is that 'sheep, lambs and calves are patients' (*CP*, p. 1209). For Hughes, the farm is associated not with the abattoir but its antithesis: the hospital. Though

⁵⁷ For more on the theme of violence in Hughes's work and the reception of his early poems, see Paul Bentley, *Ted Hughes, Class and Violence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁵⁸ Hughes's pro-meat-eating stance is connected to his pro-hunting stance. His 1967 collection *Wodwo* includes the poem 'A Vegetarian', which takes the form of a critique of the very logic upon which vegetarianism is founded. Hughes's vegetarian fears the natural world, especially the kingdom of animals: 'Staring into the emptiness, | Unable to move, he hears the hounds of the grass' (*CP*, p. 154). Hughes would later translate the Ovidian myth of Actaeon, the hunter who, having glimpsed the naked Goddess of the hunt Diana, is turned into a stag and pursued by his own hounds (*CP*, p. 937-42). In the earlier poem, the vegetarian is pursued by his own fear; divorcing himself from the natural world he comes to perceive it as a threat. Landry points out that the anxious character in Hughes's poem is the modern descendant of the original 'urban identified', and how 'urbanity might be said to be measurable in terms of distance from the world of agricultural production and livestock-rearing, of hunting, butchering and meat production': see Landry, p. 115.

this association does not preclude violence and death, the emphasis in the poems themselves is almost exclusively on the husbandry side of the process. If there is cruelty in agriculture, then in Hughes's mind it exists in spite of, and not because of, the efforts of the farmer. The focus in his poems, as he puts it himself, is on 'nursing [animals] against what often seem to be the odds' (*CP*, p. 1209).

In the poem 'Dehorning', Hughes describes the process of removing the horns of fully grown cattle, a particularly gruesome operation that is performed, as Hughes explains, primarily in the interests of the safety of the herd as a whole (*CP*, p. 1205). He recounts how the cattle are herded,

One by one, into the cage of the crush: the needle,
A roar not like a cow – more like a tiger,
Blast of air down a cavern, and long, long
Beginning in pain and ending in terror – then the next.
(*CP*, p. 504)

Here, the anaesthetising of each beast is contained within a single sentence, at first prompting the image of an industrial assembly line. As the cattle are immobilised and injected, Hughes's syntax becomes increasingly taut and fragmented, as if the poem itself is responding to the torture. By describing the sound of each animal's pain as a 'roar [...] more like a tiger', Hughes is possibly recalling his earlier encounters of predators contained within cages at Regent's Park Zoo, the subjects of his poems about jaguars from *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*.⁵⁹ Just as the cage cannot contain 'The Jaguar' in the earlier poem, so the 'cage of the crush' is transformed into a primeval 'cavern', and the farmer's relationship with the animal is seen as far more complex than it might at first appear. Or at least this is the impression before the final matter-of-fact phrase 'then the

⁵⁹ The georgic sense of compromise in *Moortown Diary* is not restricted to the representation of domesticated animals. In 'Foxhunt', the perspective of Hughes's farmer/speaker complicates his earlier expressions regarding the capturing of animals and poems in a hunting context: fox hunting is described as 'A machine with only two products | Dog-shit and dead foxes' (*CP*, p. 507). This negative impression is complicated further in the pro-hunting position Hughes came to articulate later in life when the public debate around fox-hunting reached its climax: see Ted Hughes, 'The Hart of the Mystery', *Guardian*, 5 July 1997, p. 21. For more on the complications surrounding Hughes's hunting stance and his environmentalism see Reddick, *Environmentalism and Ecopoet*, pp. 289-312.

next' brings the poem back to the task at hand and the pain of the individual creature is once again seen in the context of the agricultural process as a whole.

In the prose supplement added to the poem in 1989, Hughes reveals:

As it happens, I made another note on the very same occasion, a different kind of observation, which now reminds me what a shattering effect the operation had on me, though I am not squeamish. As if the horns had been repeatedly sawn off me.

(CP, p. 1205)

He then immediately adds the explanation: 'The "crush" is an adjustable steel cage for immobilizing a beast' (CP, p. 1205). As in the poem, Hughes's more sympathetic feelings for the animals as individuals are offset by a down-to-earth and practical explanation of farming equipment and tasks. The 'crush' comes to represent much more than a steel cage: it is a stage for the hospital drama of working with animals, a structure that is comparable to the shape and form of the poems themselves, facilitating the make-do practicalities of veterinary work but also functioning as a symbol for Hughes's misgivings regarding the cruelty inflicted upon these semi-wild lifeforms. In short, the 'crush' of Hughes's poetry is where people as well as animals feel intensely the pressures of modern agriculture.

In the preface to *Moortown Diary*, Hughes writes about how farming in the 1970s became an 'industrial servitude, in effect farming not stock and land but grants and subsidies,' and highlights the plight of small-scale farming enterprises in the difficult economic conditions under the CAP, what he describes as 'the EEC Agricultural Policy War' or 'the Third World War conducted by other means' (CP, p. 1204).⁶⁰ In a letter sent to his brother Gerald in 1974, he complains of the plight of small-scale farmers, expressing how it was a 'miracle' he had not already gone bankrupt. In the same letter, Hughes mentions the 'purchase' of a 'phenomenal bull' named Sexton Hyades XXXIII, expressing how he has 'never enjoyed owning anything 1/10 as much [...] It isn't just his

⁶⁰ The CAP refers to the Common Agricultural Policy, the agricultural policy of the European Union.

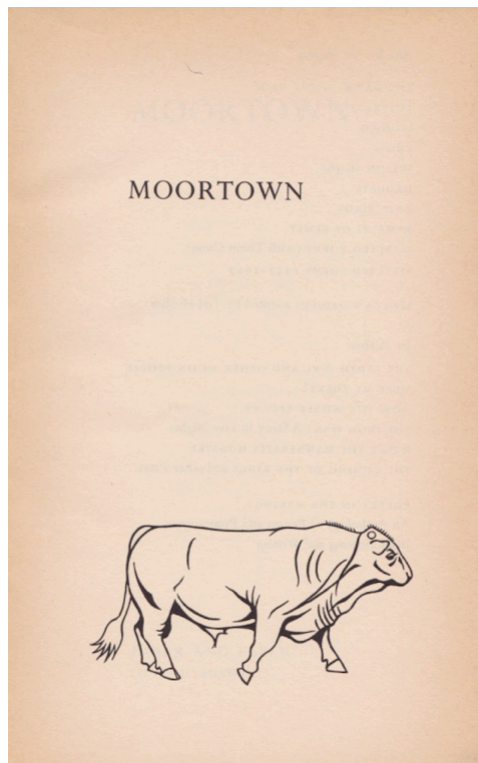


Figure 1.1. Ted Hughes, 'Drawing', *Moortown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), half-title page; note the religious spot on the bull's forehead. The drawing may well be based on a photograph of Sexton taken at Moortown Farm (see Figure 1.3).

incredible size & beauty—he has a strange, sweet nature, in every respect like an unusual person' (*LTH*, p. 358). This is a long way from Hughes's depiction of 'The Bull Moses' in *Lupercal*, where the animal is seen across an abyss of estrangement. Rather, Hughes's Devon bull is both his property and his familiar, a purchase with a personality.

Sexton the bull may be absent from *Moortown Diary*, but he does appear on the half-title page of Hughes's 1979 volume *Moortown* in the form of an illustration by Hughes (Figure 1.1).⁶¹ What is remarkable is how much Hughes's drawing resembles a cave painting with its bold strokes and side-on profile. Citing

'the overwhelming presence of bovines in cave art', Linda Kalof explains how certain species 'played a particularly important role in the human perception of creation, birth, life and death, and no species was so critical to human civilisation as cattle.'⁶² As Hannah Velten explains, cattle have for centuries been associated with capital: 'the term "cattle" is derived from the Middle English and Old Northern French *catel*, the late Latin *captale* and the Latin *capitale*, meaning "capital" in the sense of chattel of chief property.'⁶³ The tone of the letter to Gerald Hughes suggests that Hughes's fondness for Sexton is connected to his economic concerns, but there is more to it than that. Published in 1979, *Moortown* is comprised of a number of sequential works that Hughes composed

⁶¹ Hughes's illustration also featured as a gilt image on the front cover of the Rainbow Press special edition of *Moortown Elegies*.

⁶² Linda Kalof, *Looking at Animals in Human History* (London: Reaktion, 2007), p. 11.

⁶³ Hannah Velten, *Cow* (London: Reaktion, 2007), p. 22.

throughout the seventies in the wake of *Crow*, including ‘Prometheus on his Crag’, ‘Earth Numb’, and ‘Adam and the Sacred Nine’, all of which feature an array of animal spirit forms. The volume also contains Hughes’s Moortown sequence in its entirety and was the first mass market publication of the poems. In the spirit of the other sequences in *Moortown*, Hughes viewed the animals on his farm as more than livestock, possessions and products, but also as totems, spirits and symbols. In the final image of ‘Teaching a Dumb Calf’, for instance, a cow and calf are depicted as an ‘ancient statue’ (*CP*, p. 527), and a new born calf in ‘Struggle’ is ‘like a pieta Christ’ (*CP*, p. 509). Elsewhere, in an unpublished poem entitled ‘Cows’, Hughes suggests that ‘There’s a ruined holy city | In the herd of lying-down cud-chewing cows’ (*CP*, p. 619).⁶⁴

For Hughes, economic and cultural, even spiritual, concerns are also inevitably environmental concerns. In a review of Max Nicholson’s *The Environmental Revolution* (1970), Hughes demonstrates that he is aware of such associations:

The fundamental guiding ideas of our Western Civilisation are against Conservation [...] They are based on the assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use. By the skin of her teeth, woman escaped the same role.

(*WP*, p. 129)

Putting aside the questionable claim that women escaped this subjection, the notion of conservation shows how Hughes’s treatment of his bull is connected to his ideas concerning the environment at large. Hughes defines ‘Conservation’, which he gives a capital ‘C’, simply as the combination of ‘our sudden alertness to the wholeness of nature, and the lateness of the hour’ (*WP*, p. 132). Elsewhere in the review, he laments modern farming practices in similar terms:

⁶⁴ ‘Cows’ was published as a broadside in 1981 by Nicholas Hughes for the benefit of Farms for City Children.

The opportunisms of some farmers, who act as if history were finished, and their soil would not be needed after another thirty years, as if the public who buy what they grow were a species better killed off quickly and profitably, has to be seen to be believed.

(*WP*, p. 131).⁶⁵

Hughes does qualify his statement by arguing that this is only the attitude of ‘some’ farmers, but he goes on to claim in the review that the damning environmental revelations of Rachel Carson’s seminal *Silent Spring* (1962), for instance, even ten years after its initial publication, has not reached the ‘average farmer’ (*WP*, p. 129).⁶⁶ Hughes, however, was not the average farmer and had first encountered Carson in the 1950s while in the United States (see *LTH*, p. 125).⁶⁷ Writing in the ‘Preface’ to *Moortown Diary*, he describes how on their own farm, after unsuccessfully trying some of the ‘novelties’ of modern farming, they ‘eventually settled into the old fashioned routine of running a suckler herd of beef cows, a flock of breeding ewes, and keeping everything going on bailer twine’ (*CP*, p. 1205).

Hughes’s bull may be an economic necessity, an investment, but it is also something to be admired, in terms of both aesthetic appreciation and emotional attachment.⁶⁸ In a poem about Sexton entitled ‘Hoof Trimming’, originally conceived as part of the Moortown sequence but which until recently remained unpublished, Hughes

⁶⁵ In *The Environmental Revolution*, Nicholson highlights the ‘great expansion of toxic chemicals for use in crop production and animal husbandry’, arguing that ‘it has been left to the nature conservation movement [as opposed to the government or the agricultural industry] to put the problem in perspective on the basis of incontestable fact, and to face changes of practice and regulatory action’: see Max Nicholson, *The Environmental Revolution: A Guide for the New Masters of the World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), p. 217.

⁶⁶ As Carol Hughes and the Ted Hughes Estate confirmed in a letter written to the author, Carson’s *Silent Spring* ‘informed his view on agriculture + the environment’: Carol Hughes, Letter to Jack Thacker, 16 May 2016.

⁶⁷ The works by Carson that Hughes first encountered were *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955).

⁶⁸ If the bull had pride of place in Hughes’s material possessions, he also granted it prominence among his literary assets. Craig Raine tells the story of how Hughes would show off his prize bull to visiting poets and invite them to compose poems in its honour. Raine himself manages a stanza in a longer poem, entitled ‘Rich’: ‘And this is her bull | Drooling over his dummy, | His angular buttocks. | Crusted with cradle cap.’ Hughes’s response indicates just how particular he was about the literary life of his bull: ‘Great,’ he replies, ‘but I hope that isn’t *our* bull. His buttocks aren’t angular at all’: see Craig Raine, *Haydn and the Valve Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1990), pp. 495–98. Sexton the bull also features in a poem by Leslie Norris and Charles E. Wadsworth, entitled ‘The Beautiful Young Devon Shorthorn Bull, Sexton Hyades XXXIII’, in Leslie Norris, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), p. 218.

describes how the bull's hooves, which have grown out of shape, are in need of treatment.⁶⁹ In a passage that recalls the bloody scenes of 'Dehorning', Hughes documents the process whereby the bull is herded into 'the tight cage of the crush' and its hooves are trimmed back:

The crooked slipper of hoof
Begins to shape up. But nestled in the core –
Something painful. The blade's found it. Sexton

Signals every touch. The knife sculpts.
Returns to the guilty quick. Sexton cries
No No in the language
We can ignore.⁷⁰

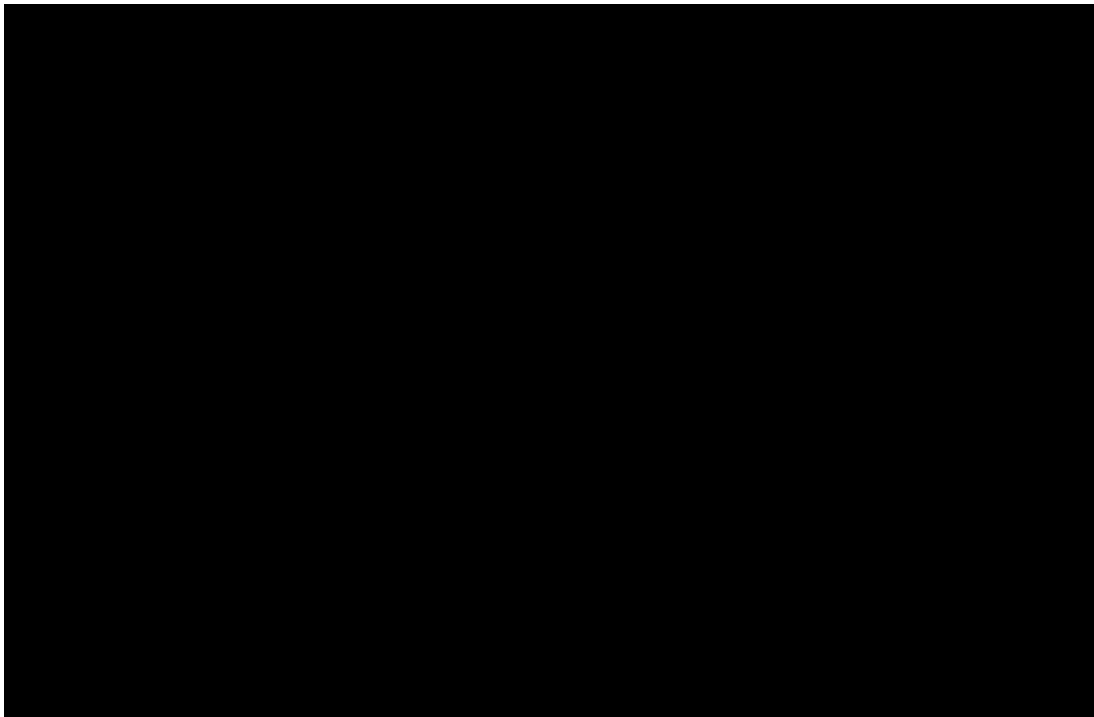


Figure 1.2. Peter Redgrove, 'Ted Hughes dehorning a bull', 1970s, Moortown Farm, Devon, Redgove Estate and University of Sheffield. I am grateful to Neil Roberts for bringing this image to my attention. The title describes Hughes 'dehorning' his bull (Sexton), but evidence in the archives at the British Library suggests that the operation is either that described in 'Hoof Trimming' or the act of giving Sexton a new nose ring: see Hughes, 'Season Songs', British Library, ADD Ms. 88918/128/5.

⁶⁹ Despite sculpting numerous drafts and typescripts of 'Hoof-trimming' Hughes chose not to publish it in his lifetime. The poem was published posthumously by the Ted Hughes Estate in 2015 in *The Spectator*, with a note explaining that it was originally written for the Moortown sequence, as well as a photograph of the bull in all its former glory taken in profile (Figure 1.3): see Hughes, 'Season Songs', British Library, ADD Ms. 88918/1/55; Ted Hughes, 'Hoof-trimming', *Spectator*, 19 February 2015 <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/09/hoof-trimming/>> [accessed 18 July 2016].

⁷⁰ Hughes, 'Hoot-trimming'.

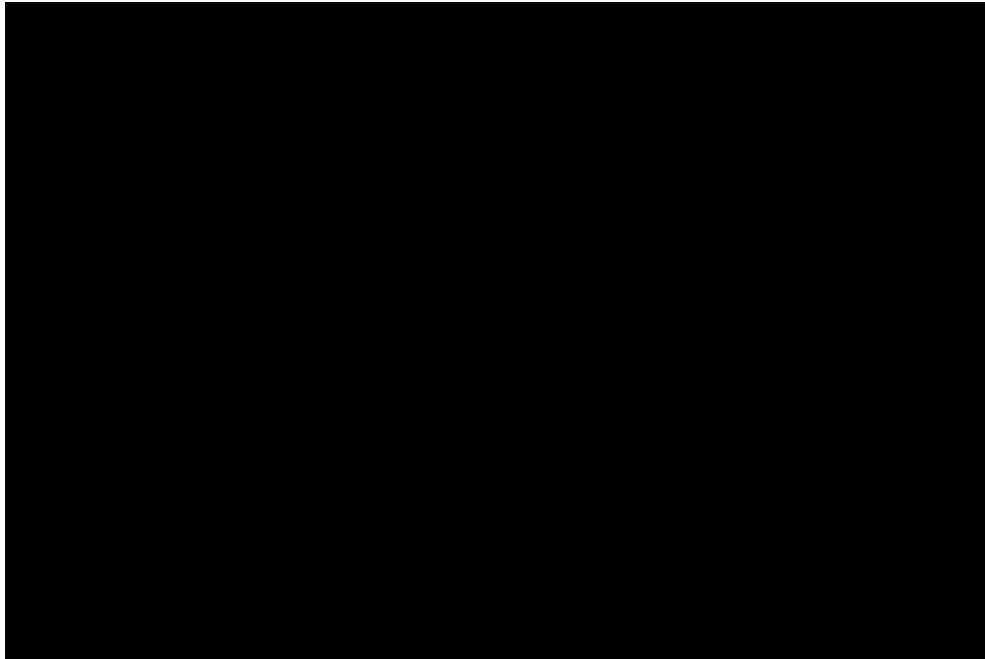


Figure 1.3. Photograph of Sexton the bull, Moortown Farm, Devon, *The Spectator*, 19 February 2015, Carol Hughes and the Ted Hughes Estate. Carol Hughes provides the following text to accompany the poem and image: ‘Sexton remained at Moortown for many years after his working life, and was buried there in 1991. Some time later his remains were moved to Court Green.’

As with ‘Dehorning’, the title of ‘Hoof-trimming’ could either be in gerund or participle form; in the case of both poems it remains unclear if the poem is describing the activity of the farmer or the experience of the creature – or indeed both. By claiming in his note to ‘Little Red Twin’ that the impression of the farmer is that livestock are ‘patients’, Hughes highlights their passive status in a grammatical sense: they undergo the agricultural process. As becomes apparent in ‘Dehorning’ and ‘Hoof-trimming’, however, Hughes’s account of their tribulations places them on an equal footing, grammatically speaking, with their human counterparts. In the phrase above, for example – ‘The crooked slipper of hoof | Begins to shape up’ – the agent of the sentence is also the *patient* of the action. Here, Hughes avoids active/passive constructions and instead opts for what would be referred to in languages such as Arabic, Biblical Hebrew, and Ancient Greek as ‘the middle voice’. The hoof, which stands metonymically for the bull, is passive in the operation; it is being shaped. Yet, as Hughes has it, it is also actively shaping itself; by extension, Hughes is both the agent and the patient: the operation is a procedure that has

fallen to him and that he too must undergo, just as he states when he describes his own sense of trauma in the note to 'Dehorning' (above) (Figure 1.2). In 'Hoof Trimming', both the bull and the poet are sensitive to 'every touch' of the knife, which 'sculpts' rather than cuts. Nestled in the core of the poem is the guilt of the farmer but the action is carried out in the knowledge that the pain caused is a healing one and that the hand is anaesthetising as well as aestheticizing.

The pressures of modern agriculture were felt as much by Hughes as the animals in his care. This is expressed both powerfully and sympathetically in the poems, and politically as well as practically in the accompanying prose. The Moortown poems have previously been praised by critics as examples of anti-anthropocentrism in Hughes's work.⁷¹ Yet as the above demonstrates, Hughes's anti-anthropocentrism does not preclude anthropomorphism; in fact, it depends upon it. By describing Sexton as a patient or even a 'person', Hughes by implication emphasises the animal in the human, demonstrating how it is not just other creatures that are at the mercy of 'industrial servitude'. For Hughes, the issue at stake was not merely one of animal rights but cultural rights, highlighting the value he came to place on 'country life' and quality of life, both human and animal: the subject of chapter II.

⁷¹ Scigaj, p. 170; Lidström, p. 142.

CHAPTER II

‘Back to the ordinary’: Ted Hughes’s *Moortown Diary*

The marginalisation of animals is today being followed by the marginalisation and disposal of the only class who, throughout history, has remained familiar with animals and maintained the wisdom which accompanies that familiarity: the middle and small peasant.

John Berger, ‘Why Look at Animals?’¹

the whole landscape
is imperilled

Ted Hughes, ‘New Year Exhilaration’
(*CP*, 508)

In the ‘Preface’ to *Moortown Diary*, Hughes writes that in order to capture the details described in the poems in the particular way in which they are described, each poem ‘had to be set down soon after the event’:

If I missed the moment – which meant letting a night’s sleep intervene before I took up a pen – I could always see quite clearly what had been lost [...] The pieces here which begin to look a little more like ‘poems’ mark the occasions where I had ‘missed the moment’ in this way.

(*CP*, p. 1205)

One such poem in which Hughes appears to have ‘missed the moment’, as he puts it, is ‘Roe-deer’. The poem describes an encounter with two deer in a blizzard on the road at dawn. Besides the fact that the poem’s subject matter distinguishes it from most of the other poems in the sequence, it is the form of ‘Roe-deer’ first and foremost that sets it apart.² It is written, with the exception of one line only, in couplets of varying length.

These are its closing lines:

¹ Berger, ‘Why Look at Animals?’, pp. 26-28.

² A small handful of the poems focus mainly not on farming and farm animals but on the wildlife found in the English countryside: ‘Poor Birds,’ ‘Foxhunt,’ ‘Snow Smoking as the Fields Boil,’ ‘Roe-deer,’ and ‘Coming Down Through Somerset’.

Then they ducked through the hedge, and upright they rode their legs
Away downhill over the snow-lonely field

Towards tree dark – finally
Seeming to eddy and glide and fly away up

Into the boil of big flakes.
The snow took them and soon their nearby hoofprints as well

Revising its dawn inspiration
Back to the ordinary.

(CP, p. 513)

There are plenty of stylistic features in these lines to suggest that this is a typical Hughes Moortown poem: the simple past tense, diary entry register; compound adjectives ('snow-lonely') and nouns ('tree dark'); unusual imagery describing the weather ('boil of big flakes'). In terms of form, however, it is a more considered piece (i.e. all of a piece) than many of the other poems in the sequence. This is not Hughes channelling Shakespearean blank verse, nor does it bear the signs of a poem that has been left unedited since its first draft.³ Rather, it is more of a 'poem' in the strict sense of the word, its delicate couplets evoking the phenomenon of the deer themselves.⁴

Or at least this is the impression when the poem is read on its own as it was first published in 1978/79. In its later 1989 form in *Moortown Diary*, its aspect is profoundly altered. First of all, it is altered by Hughes's decision to bring all of the poems in the sequence under a new title (*Diary*) and in so doing emphasise their journal-like – as opposed to their more elegiac and literary – qualities. Second, he added a date of

³ There are multiple manuscript and typescript versions of this poem amongst the material relating to *Moortown Diary* in the Ted Hughes Papers held at the British Library: see Hughes, 'Moortown Diary', 1 folder, London, British Library, Edward James Hughes Papers, ADD Ms. 88918/1/45.

⁴ In a draft version of a 'Note to go before ROE DEER', Hughes records that 'I'm occasionally told, there are more deer now in Devon than ever before in recorded history. Blake's | The wild deer wondering here and there | Keep the human soul from care | was one rhyme that brought me to Devon in the first place': see Hughes, 'Moortown Diary', British Library, ADD Ms. 88918/1/45. Hughes kept a close eye on the deer population throughout his life and owned a copy of *The Roe Deer*, a pamphlet published by the Forestry Commission in 1970. Furthermore, his account in 'Roe-deer' has literary parallels Robert Frost's 'Two Look at Two' and Elizabeth Bishop's 'The Moose'. Heaney and Hughes anthologise both Frost and Bishop in *The Rattle Bag* and *The School Bag*, and ghosts of Frost's 'Desert Places' and 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', both collected in *The Rattle Bag*, can also be detected in the poem.

composition.⁵ Additionally, he added a note to 'Roe-deer' at the end of the book, as he did for just under half of the poems.⁶ All of these factors contribute to a change in the tone not only in 'Roe-deer' but also in the sequence as a whole.

Unlike many of the footnotes Hughes added when he republished the volume (most of which explain the context for a poem or enlighten the reader on the details of its agricultural subject matter), the note to 'Roe-deer' reads much like a diary entry itself. It describes an event that took place about two months after the encounter depicted in the poem, in which Hughes comes across another roe-deer while fishing in the River Taw, in a spot not far from the location of the original poem. It is, in his own words, another 'strange episode', as he describes this second encounter in what are, at first, 'unnatural' terms:

With those bright, rather brassy sunbeams full on him he looked absolutely solid and yet – unnatural: I could only think he must be some kind of earthly troll, some little old man living wild, or maybe even a little old woman. It was his confident approach, of course, that blocked the obvious. But my amazement hardly lessened when I realised that it was a roe-deer. It came the whole distance in a dead straight line. Till it stood, within twenty paces, clearly trying to puzzle out what kind of creature I might be, and thinking, perhaps, that I might be a big roe-buck. Then it circled to the left and studied me some more. Finally it turned and loped away up the field, stopping now and again to look back, till it paused, where I'd first seen it, looking back.

(*CP*, p. 1207)

Hughes's 'note' describes multiple layers of interpretation – from first-impressions and mistaken identities to re-examinations in the clear light of day. Initially, Hughes sees the roe-deer as something supernatural, an 'earthly troll,' before reinterpreting it again as an 'old man', an 'old woman', before finally coming to the realisation that it is in fact a deer. The roe-deer is also unsure of what to make of Hughes, who imagines it thinks of him as

⁵ He did this for all of the poems in the sequence, except for the elegies for Orchard, in the case of 'Roe-deer': '13 February 1973'.

⁶ Out of thirty-five poems, the fifteen that are supplemented by a footnote are as follows: 'Dehorning', 'Poor Birds', 'Foxhunt', 'Roe-deer', 'She Has Come to Pass', 'Birth of Rainbow', 'Orf', 'Happy Calf', 'Little Red Twin', 'Teaching a Dumb Calf', 'While She Chews Sideways', 'Sheep' (I and II), 'A Monument', and 'A Memory'. There is evidence in the archives at the British Library (Hughes, 'Moortown Diary', British Library, ADD Ms. 88918/1/45) that Hughes drafted more notes for other poems in the collection as well as more extensive original notes on these poems.

a roe-buck. The deer ‘studies’ Hughes as he studies it, stopping to ‘look back’ where he had first seen it. The ambiguity of the syntax in the final sentence means that the final ‘looking back’ could be attributed to either Hughes or the deer, as they both perform a double take at each other.

This second ‘strange episode’, writes Hughes, ‘sent [him] back to re-read [his] own verses’ (*CP*, p. 1207). Subsequently, looking back at the poem more than a decade after it was first written, in the context of preparing the note for *Moortown Diary*, Hughes recalls the event as it happened shortly after poem’s conception. All of this ‘looking back’ and double-taking on his own work contributes to multiple layers of interpretation. In the original publication of *Moortown Elegies*, the deer of ‘Roe-deer’ maintain their ghostly, ethereal quality. In *Moortown Diary*, on the other hand, with the addition of the date and footnote, they are firmly grounded in the real; as strange as they appear at first, the encounter is given the specificity of a time and a place, as well as the accompaniment of a description of a similar encounter – one which ends this time with Hughes seeing the deer for what they really are. In the latter version of the poem, the deer are just as marvellous for being themselves.

In *Moortown Diary*, Hughes is uncovering and laying bare his tracks, revising his own ‘dawn inspiration | Back to the ordinary’. Hughes’s return to ‘Roe-deer’ parallels his sense of ‘February 17th’ as losing its particular quality when he tried to refine it. As such, ‘Roe-deer’ is a poem that reflects on and gives a clue to the significance of those poems which are less polished in the collection. Hughes may not have initially intended to publish his farming verses as a ‘diary’, but their appearance under this title and alongside paratextual material (such as the ‘note’ to ‘Roe-deer’) renders them doubly significant as poems that depict the everyday experience of living and working in the countryside.⁷ It is

⁷ In letters to Keith Sagar, dated from 1977, Hughes already refers to the sequence as a ‘diary’, even if he had decided at that stage to give the sequence the title ‘Moortown Elegies’: see Ted Hughes, ‘[21 April 1977]’ and ‘30 May 1977’, in *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar*, ed. by Sagar, pp. 55, 57.

critical in the context of this current investigation to understand why Hughes might have wanted to alter the poems in this way – without changing the words themselves – over a decade after their first appearance, especially considering the fact that he had already published the sequence twice in its entirety. It is also crucial to examine precisely how their appearance in *Moortown Diary* alters their status as poems (or as ‘casual journal notes’ according to Hughes), both individually and as a whole, in Hughes’s mind as well as in the minds of his readers. In the case of ‘Roe-deer’, the events described in the poem resonate with the life of the poem in its various guises; what is at first a brief, haunting encounter later becomes what resembles a nature diary entry, complete with added diurnal documentation. As has been noted, Hughes was an admirer of Keith Douglas’s ‘documentary bent’, and Alice Oswald has drawn attention to Hughes’s own process of ‘documentary’ in *Moortown Diary* (*LTH*, pp. 543-54).⁸ This chapter re-examines precisely how and why Hughes documents Devon in the 1989 version specifically. It is in this version of the poems, more than in their other guises, it is argued, that Hughes presents the agricultural world and the community of Devon in a way that is more sensitive to the lives of those in the rural community he came to see himself as a part of. By honouring the activity and the struggle of the everyday lives of farmers, but also by paying heed to the larger pressures on agriculture and the environment in the late-twentieth century, *Moortown Diary* is where Hughes’s work is at its most georgic.

‘A Useful Adjunct’

In April 1979, a number of the Moortown poems were included in Michael Morpurgo’s *All Around the Year*.⁹ The book takes the form of a day-by-day account of life on a

⁸ Oswald, ‘Wild Things’.

⁹ Eight of the twelve poems by Hughes included in the book are taken from the Moortown sequence: ‘The Formal Auctioneer’, ‘Rain’, ‘New Year Exhilaration’, ‘Couples Under Cover’, ‘Birth of Rainbow’, ‘Happy Calf’, ‘Last Load’, and ‘Coming Down Through Somerset’. Of the four other poems published in the

working farm, revealing the many problems the farmer has to contend with: weather, stock, disease, crops, and finance. Like Hughes's *Moortown Diary*, the work is site-specific: as the co-director of the charity Farms for City Children, Morpurgo worked closely with the Ward family, who own Parsonage Farm in Iddesleigh in North Devon (Hughes's Moortown Farm and Ward's Parsonage both lie within sight of Dartmoor).¹⁰ Critics have largely overlooked the inclusion of a selection of the Moortown poems in *All Around the Year*. The exception is Dennis Walder, who argues that their appearance 'provides a useful adjunct to the "Elegies"' of the original publication.¹¹ Walder's assessment can be interpreted as a pun: Morpurgo's diary offers readers of Hughes a useful alternative to the literary category of elegy; the poems are also *useful* in the sense of being both instructive and educational.

In 1976, Morpurgo and his wife Claire founded Farms for City Children, with the aim of providing children from inner cities with access to the experience of a working farm. Hughes – at the time a close neighbour to the Morpurgos – became the charity's first president and both Ted and Carol Hughes would play an active role in supporting the charity over a number of decades.¹² Parsonage Farm was the original base for the charity and provided the location for *All Around the Year*. The book can therefore be considered as an official literary and practical accompaniment to Morpurgo's charity work. The format of Morpurgo's prose – the majority of the text in the volume – is written in two registers: a diary that covers the day-to-day farming activity over the course of the year, and explanatory notes illuminating for the reader the diary's agricultural contexts and

volume, one poem, 'Stealing Trout on a May Morning', is taken from the earlier limited edition *Recklings* (1966), and three others, 'Barley', 'A Solstice', and 'Foal' ('New Foal'), were uncollected until the posthumous *Collected Poems* in 2003. See Michael Morpurgo, *All Around the Year* (London: John Murray, 1979).

¹⁰ In *Moortown Diary*, in his note to the poem 'Foxhunt', Hughes refers to Iddesleigh as 'a village very close to the setting of this journal' (*CP*, p. 1206).

¹¹ Dennis Walder, *Ted Hughes* (Milton Keynes; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1987), p. 85. *All Around the Year* is also acknowledged in Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, p. 292.

¹² Carol Hughes remains to this day a vice-president of the charity.

vocabulary. Hughes's involvement in the project meant that for the first time an educational, instructive – and even at times didactic – text informed a number of the farming poems.

All Around the Year was not only a collaboration between Morpurgo, the Wards, and Hughes. The poems, the diary, and the notes are accompanied by photographs by the Devon-based rural documentary photographer James Ravilious, as well as drawings by his wife Robin Ravilious. Each photograph was taken on or around Parsonage farm and sheds light (in more ways than one) on the prose and notes by Morpurgo, as well as on Hughes's poems. In one sense, the poems, the photographs, and the illustrations are adjuncts to Morpurgo's text; yet correspondingly, the notes, the photographs, and illustrations may also be considered as useful adjuncts to Hughes's poems.

The book is arranged according to season, beginning in September and ending in August. Commencing each chapter/season are poems by Hughes, on an appropriate seasonal or agricultural subject. The annual arrangement of the book, and the fact that it is aimed at both adults and children, suggests parallels with *Season Songs*, which charts the progression of seasonal cycles in the countryside over the course of a year. Despite this, the inclusion of poems from the Moortown sequence, coupled with Morpurgo's detailed diary entries and notes, means that there are in fact stronger associations with *Moortown Diary*. A brief examination of a poem from that collection, which also features in *All Around the Year*, illustrates how its appearance in Morpurgo's book might have altered its status for Hughes.

Heralding the month of March in *All Around the Year* is Hughes's poem 'Birth of Rainbow'. The poem describes the birth of a calf beneath the arc of a rainbow. After the birth, however, the weather takes a turn for the worse:

[...] We left her to it.
Blobbed antiseptic onto the sodden blood-dangle
Of his muddy birth-cord, and left her
Inspecting the new smell. The whole South West

Was black as nightfall,
 Trailing squall-smokes hung over the moor leaning
 And whitening towards us, then the world blurred
 And disappeared in forty-five degree hail
 And a gate-jerking blast. We got to cover.
 Left to God the calf and its mother.
 (CP, p. 522)

Three times the speaker describes how they ‘left her’, abandoning the mother and her calf to the elements. There is also the invocation of ‘God’ in the final line, framing the image of the rainbow with a sense of the biblical but also emphasising Hughes’s conflicted feelings about his abandonment of the pair. In the note to this poem in *Moortown Diary*, Hughes explains how the final line is a reference to the final line of a Robert Frost poem ‘Good-by and Keep Cold’, which ‘strayed into [his] head’ when he was drafting it: ‘Something has to be left to God’ (CP, p. 1208).¹³ Strictly speaking, Hughes misquotes (or selectively quotes) the line and leaves out the ‘But’: ‘*But* something has to be left to God’ (emphasis added). Frost’s poem concerns the abandonment of an orchard in winter conditions and includes the subtle comparison between the orchard and a dying person: ‘Its heart sinks lower under the sod.’¹⁴ As Richard Poirier writes of Frost’s speaker: ‘His denial to the orchard of a status in his emotions equal to that of a freezing and dying loved one nonetheless suggests that with the latter he would know how to act compassionately.’¹⁵ Hughes’s allusion to the poem, simplified with the omission of the ‘But’, is on the one hand an attempt to provide a positive gloss: Hughes writes how he ‘made a quick bow around that, to tie the piece up,’ with the almost half-rhyme of ‘mother’ and cover’ reinforcing this idea, neatly coupling up the last two lines (CP, p. 1208).¹⁶ Yet even Hughes cannot fully conceal the ambiguity inherent in Frost’s final

¹³ Robert Frost, ‘Good-by and Keep Cold’, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. by Edward Connery Lathem (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 228.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Richard Poirier, *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 193.

¹⁶ Introducing ‘Birth of Rainbow’ at a poetry reading in 1978, Hughes makes the effort to frame it as a ‘happy’ episode: ‘Just as we would’, he explains, ‘if we dreamed about the birth of a beautiful calf under the end of a rainbow. “Surely”, we’d think, “that means things are on the up and up”’: see Skea, ‘Norwich Tapes’.

line, and by association his own. There is a palpable sense of guilt in Hughes's speaker that his sympathy for the pair does not quite match up to his own standards of how to treat others under difficult circumstances, animal or human. In both cases, 'God' is invoked as a consolation but only highlights what is in fact an absence of care.¹⁷

When 'Birth of Rainbow' appears in *All Around the Year*, however, the poem leans in a different direction, resembling an optimistic and educational vignette of farming life. The weather is depicted with a language of precision ('forty-five degree hail') while the geographical positioning of the scene in the 'South West' (and the added date in the case of the *Moortown Diary* version: '19th March 1974') grounds it in a distinct time and place. Furthermore, the description of how they 'blobbed antiseptic' onto the umbilical cord, described as a 'sodden blood-dangle', is a long way from the biblical, instead serving as a practical reminder of the necessity of care in the context of animal husbandry. In this regard the poem supplements Morpurgo's instructions in his notes on the importance of hygiene in the handling of livestock.¹⁸

In the note to 'Birth of Rainbow' in *Moortown Diary*, Hughes writes about how he forced himself to record the details described in the poem soon after the event took place: 'that night I pushed myself out of bed to make the note, knowing that by the next day I would for sure have lost the authentic fingerprints of the day itself' (*CP*, p. 1208). Here, Hughes's reference to the 'note' does not in actual fact refer to the prose entry in which it appears but the poem itself, and is thus another example of his reluctance to call the pieces poems in their own right. This is doubly significant because it shows that

¹⁷ In his recent biography of Hughes, Bate argues that the poem 'Roe-deer' (above) could be an elegy for Sylvia Plath, as it depicts a snowy evening exactly a year and a week after Plath's suicide. It is a possibility that Hughes is thinking of these events in 'Birth of Rainbow' also, or possibly the suicide of Assia Wevill, who also took the life of their daughter together, Shura. Such associations, though they are not my focus here, create a strong connection between the idea of Hughes as husband and husbandman. See Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, pp. 319-20. For more on the *Moortown Diary* in the context of elegy, see Hadley, and Twiddy, pp. 53-102.

¹⁸ For an example, see Morpurgo, p. 53.

Hughes remained sensitive to the poem as an ‘authentic fingerprint’ as well as to its more literary qualities – as emphasised, for example, in the allusion to Frost.¹⁹

Parallels with Morpurgo’s farm diary can also be found in poems that do not appear in *All Around the Year*. As in the case of ‘Roe-deer’, the poem ‘Orf’ is another example of a more crafted piece than the majority in *Moortown Diary*, with Hughes recalling in the accompanying note that he ‘missed the moment, here, by about two weeks’ (*CP*, p. 1208). The poem begins:

Because his nose and his face were one festering sore
That no treatment persuaded, month after month,
And his feet four sores, the same,
Which could only stand and no more,

Because his sickness was converting his growth
Simply to strengthening sickness
While his breath wheezed through a mask of flies
No stuff could rid him of

I shot the lamb.
I shot him while he was looking the other way.
I shot him between the ears.

(*CP*, p. 522-23)

Again, there is the palpable sense in these lines that through writing the poem Hughes is justifying to himself his decision to give up on the animal (‘Because’, ‘Because’), referring elsewhere in the poem to ‘the lamb-life in my care’ (*CP*, p. 523). There is also the idea that the poem serves as an elegy for the lamb, a memorial in the same way that the poems at the end of the sequence are dedicated to the memory of Jack Orchard. Hughes’s use of rhetoric and formal devices such as anaphora (‘Because’, ‘I shot’) and rhyme (‘sore’, ‘more’) consolidates the poem’s crafted appearance, as if these lines, rather than remaining in draft form, are set firmly in stone. Once more, Hughes channels

¹⁹ Like Hughes, Frost also came up against the question of authenticity. In a letter to Louise Untermeyer, he recounts how a friend of his, ‘an unsophisticated farmer and real estate agent’, handed a copy of ‘Good-bye and Keep Cold’ to pomologists at the Agricultural College of Massachusetts, who concluded: ‘pomologically it was alright, but poetically not’: see Robert Frost, ‘Letter to Louis Untermeyer, 14 May 1920’, *The Letters of Robert Frost*, ed. by Donald Sheeby and others, 5 vols (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014—), II, 1920-1928, ed. by Donald Sheeby, Mark Richardson, Robert Bernard Hass, and Henry Atmore (2016), p. 54.

the influence of American poets, notably Emily Dickinson and the crafted rigidity of ‘Because I could not stop for death —’, as well as Frost’s ‘Out, Out—’, especially its closing lines: ‘And they, since they | Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.’²⁰

As in the case of ‘Roe-deer,’ ‘Orf’ can be read, then, as an elegy.²¹ The accompanying note to the poem, however, begins in a different tone:

Small outbreaks of the ulcerous infection known as Orf or Lower are fairly common among sheep and lambs. It generally begins around the lips and nose, but can spread anywhere (and can even make the leap on to the shepherd).
(CP, p. 1208)

In *Moortown Diary*, crafted elegy is often supplemented by language more suitable for a field guide, and as such is closer to the register of *All Around the Year*. When compared with a similar note in that book, the tone of Hughes’s remark bears a striking resemblance to Morpurgo’s diary: for example, Morpurgo describes ‘lamb dysentery’ in very similar terms: ‘Enteritis of the small intestine, leading to scour. Every lamb is injected at birth to prevent infection.’²² When Hughes writes in his ‘Preface’ to *Moortown Diary* in 1989 that he ‘added a few sentences of introductory context here and there’, he may well have had Morpurgo’s notes in his mind, with the aim of enlightening the reader on the practicalities of agricultural labour. His notes, he explains, are for ‘any other reader who might find something of interest in them’ (that is besides Carol Hughes, for whom they are ‘a memorial to her father’), an indicator that he saw his readership as those who were interested in the practicalities of farming as well as in poetry.

²⁰ Robert Frost, ‘Out, Out—’, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, p. 137.

²¹ As Twiddy says of another poem in *Moortown Diary* ‘Last Night’, which he characterises as ‘an elegy about mourning’, that the lambs in the poem are defective ‘is fact, but the poet directs its emotional impact’: see Twiddy, p. 65. The same could be said of ‘Orf’. Yet unlike in ‘Last Night’, which describes the imagined, anthropomorphised grief of a ewe who has lost her lambs, in ‘Orf’ it is the speaker himself (in the conventional lyric ‘I’ of the pastoral elegy) who registers the emotional charge of the loss.

²² Morpurgo, p. 97.

Hughes goes on to describe in his note how certain details that did not end up making it into the poem were important to him and remained so over a decade after it was written:

The lonely, hunched-up way he stood there, in the cattle pen, on the lumpy, dry, compact bedding (which was chicken litter from a battery farm – probably part of his failure to recover!), and the way the afternoon sun came on to him from the open opposite end of the building, and the shockingly-amplified crack of the rifle under the brittle asbestos roof. That should be there. And maybe the stony grave in the wood that I dug for him, and the little oak sapling that I planted on it (an extraordinary sort of funeral for any livestock casualty).

(CP, p. 1208)

This is an extraordinary passage of admission (and omission) on Hughes's part. Here, the dual-registers of the poem and note are exemplified in the two sections in parentheses: in the first, Hughes is channelling Morpurgo, providing a factual, albeit heart-rending, explanation of the lamb's demise; the final phrase, on the other hand, is a testament to a farmer's emotional investment in his livestock. More generally, the opportunity to supplement the Moortown poems (which are restricted by what Hughes refers to elsewhere in the note as 'the requirements of the writing' (CP, p. 1208)) allowed Hughes to expand not only on the details of the events themselves but on their literary and personal significance. *Moortown Diary* finds Hughes caught between two tones engendered by two different agricultural trends: an older way of doing things in which animals are treated as individuals, and a modernised, high-pressure, industrialised form of agriculture that depends on the precise weighing up of profit and loss. It is telling that in the note to 'Orf' Hughes attributes the lamb's failure to recover to the surface of its bedding coming from a 'battery farm'.

When Morpurgo's *All Around the Year* is taken into account, it becomes clear that the poems in *Moortown Diary* can be interpreted in a number of different ways, ranging from the elegiac to the factual, or even the political. It therefore makes sense to think of the inclusion of a number of the poems in *All Around the Year* as providing more than a 'useful adjunct' to the elegies of *Moortown* for Hughes himself, offering him a different,

more practically oriented context in which to publish them. There is also another way in which their appearance in the volume alters their impact, however, and that is their proximity to the photographs by Ravilious.

Shades of Influence

Hughes collaborated with a number of artists and photographers over the course his career, producing numerous collections and special editions with the artist Leonard Baskin – most notably *Crow* (1970) and *Cave Birds* (1976) – and with the photographer Peter Keen in *River* (1983). Hughes's long-standing partnership with the photographer Fay Godwin in *Remains of Elmet* (1989) and *Elmet* (1994) resulted in some of his most successful collaborations. The appearance of Hughes's poems alongside the photographs by Ravilious in *All Around the Year*, however, has not yet received critical attention. The collaboration between Hughes and Ravilious may not have been a direct one, but the poems and the images speak to each other in many important ways, especially when it comes to the subject of poetry and rural life. In order to assess the significance of such parallels, it is worth briefly re-examining Hughes's more direct collaboration with Godwin, as the lessons Hughes learnt from this partnership are relevant to his representations of Devon in *Moortown Diary*.

Godwin had taken a portrait of Hughes in 1970, which Hughes liked. Years later, he wrote to Godwin encouraging her to apply her skills to the landscape of the Calder Valley in Yorkshire where he grew up. He had wanted to write about the area in more detail but in order to do so he 'felt the need for a visual "trigger"'.²³ They collaborated on the project over the course of 1977, the year Hughes sold his stock at Moortown and the

²³ Fay Godwin, 'Ted Hughes and *Elmet*,' in *The Epic Poise: A Celebration of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Nick Gammage (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 106-07 (p. 107).

year before the publication of the original *Moortown Elegies*. Both of them wanted the work to be ‘complementary, obliquely equivalent’ and they were both equally ‘determined not to “illustrate” each other’s work’.²⁴ The success of the partnership between Godwin and Hughes, therefore, rested on the fact that the dynamic between the text and the images had more to do with a question of general geographic reference and mood rather than the pairing of specific photographs and poems.

For Hughes, the initial appearance of the poems alongside Godwin’s photographs in *Remains of Elmet* changed the way he saw them. He wrote to Godwin in 1979 about how the ‘mutual interdependence of poems & pictures puts my poems in quite a new category [...] on a quite a new level’ (*LTH*, p. 420). When the Hughes/Godwin collaboration was re-published as *Elmet* in 1994, it included a third more photographs, additional poems, and in some cases the poems and photographs were positioned in a different relation to each other than they had been in previous versions. Hughes expressed his feeling to Godwin that this revised edition was the definitive version.²⁵

Following the lead of Terry Gifford, who comments on ‘the difference in emphasis between “empty sockets” and “survivors”’ from the *Remains* version to *Elmet*, Michael Nott has highlighted the ‘renewed emphasis on people’ in *Elmet*, detailing alterations made to the sequence and the change in title, with the dropping of the word ‘Remains’ suggesting that Hughes was able to view his poetry less as elegiac and more autobiographical, populated, and down-to-earth.²⁶ Hadley goes so far as to argue that

²⁴ Godwin, p. 107.

²⁵ Terry Gifford, ‘Interview with Fay Godwin’, *Thumbscrew* 18 (Spring 2001), 114-17 <<http://www.terrygifford.co.uk/Fay%20Godwin%20interview.pdf>> [accessed 3 January 2017]. For more on Hughes’s motivation for revising *Remains of Elmet*, both in *Elmet* and in the earlier 1993 *Three Books* version of the sequence, see Ann Skea, ‘Variant Editions: *Cave Birds*, *River*, *Remains of Elmet* and *Three Books*’, *Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 2.1 (2011), 17-19. At the end of his life, writing to Keith Sagar, Hughes expressed his misgivings about the final *Elmet* version, writing that, of the three orderings, ‘only the first one works’, and how he felt that he had ‘let Fay down, somewhat, except that first time round’, adding: ‘The correct or reasonably working order is still to be found’ (*Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Sagar*, ed. by Sagar, pp. 286-87).

²⁶ See Terry Gifford, ‘Dead Farms, Dead Leaves’: Culture as Nature in *Remains of Elmet* and *Elmet*, in *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 39-47, (p. 42),

Remains of Elmet is where Hughes emerges as a ‘rural poet’, with his essay highlighting the multi-faceted nature of the poems and the way they can be read in a number of contexts, such as pastoral, elegiac, and importantly, documentary.²⁷ He proposes:

As rural elegies, they are poems which speak from beyond the grave of failed industrial conquest, but ones that also forewarn against the repetition of the mistakes that turned Elmet into remains. In resisting pastoral elegiac modes, the language and its relation to the subject matter is objective in tone, wholly appropriate for poems which are documentations of a place and situation in time.²⁸

He goes on to add that the ‘black and white contrast’ of Godwin’s photographs are a vital part of this ‘documentation’, before reverting to his original reading by stating that both poems and photographs constitute ‘elegies’ which ‘mourn the passing of an era into history.’²⁹ As Hadley’s assessment of the poems and images suggests Hughes’s ‘rural’ poetry resists the pastoral and the elegiac at the same time that it reasserts them.

The original *Remains of Elmet* and the trade edition of *Moortown* were published the same year: 1979. As Hadley goes on to point out, in *Remains of Elmet* ‘Hughes is documenting; so it is with *Moortown Elegies*’.³⁰ It is in this regard that Hughes’s collaboration with Godwin provides an illuminating contrast to the partnership of his poems and Ravilious’s photographs in *All Around the Year*. The collaborative aspect of Morpurgo’s project presents a number of Hughes’s poems from the Moortown sequence in a ‘new category’ in much the same way that Godwin’s photographs do in relation to the *Elmet* poems. When partnered with the photographs by Ravilious, Hughes’s depiction of Devon in *All Around the Year* is at least as evocative of a distinct geographical area and community as the combination of poems and images in *Elmet*. When it comes to the

and Michael Nott, ‘Ted Hughes’s and Fay Godwin’s Elmet: The Remains of Photography’, *Word & Image*, 32.3 (2016), 267-73 (p. 268)

²⁷ Hadley, p. 55.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

subject of agriculture in particular, the relationship between Hughes's and Ravilious's work is arguably even more local and distinctive.³¹

Ravilious was the son of the renowned landscape painter Eric Ravilious, who worked primarily in watercolour and was famous for his depictions of the South Downs in Sussex and the white chalk horses in Wiltshire. James Ravilious also captured the English landscape, but his chosen medium was photography. He too, however, could be said to have painted in watercolour. These are his own thoughts on his very distinctive style of photography:

I'd like to think of a photograph or a negative as a sort of silver watercolour. [...] I like the idea of silver, the gradations of a silver that you see in a good negative, without those black and white extremes. It does relate, I think, to Englishness and softness.³²

Ravilious's images of the agricultural landscape of England – his photographs of Parsonage Farm included – were almost exclusively taken in the area of North Devon, and so arguably his comments about the 'softness' of his negatives apply not just to Englishness in general but the topography and character of the South West in particular (for example, see Figure 2.1).

In his farming poems, Hughes paints the local landscape with a similar brush. The poem 'Rain', which commences *Moortown Diary*, as well as the month of November in *All Around the Year*, evokes 'Hills wallowing | In and out of a grey or silvery dissolution. A farm gleaming' (CP, p. 503); in 'Ravens' it is a 'skyline of hills, after millions of hard years, | Sitting soft' (CP, p. 518); and another poem, 'Happy Calf', also from both *Moortown Diary* and *All Around the Year*, features 'The wind from the North | Marching

³¹ 'Local distinctiveness' is the mission statement of the arts and environmental charity Common Ground, established in 1983 by Roger Deakin and Angela Clifford. In 1989, the year of the publication of *Moortown Diary*, Common Ground organised 'Orchards', a touring exhibition of photographs by Ravilious celebrating the cultural and natural heritage of apples and orchards in the South West. For more on Common Ground see Jos Smith, 'Common Ground: Insurgence, Imagination and Intangible Cultural Heritage', in *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Michelle L. Stefano and Peter Davis (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 300-13.

³² James Ravilious, cited in *James Ravilious: A World in Photographs*, dir. by Anson Hartford (Banyak Films, 2006), film.

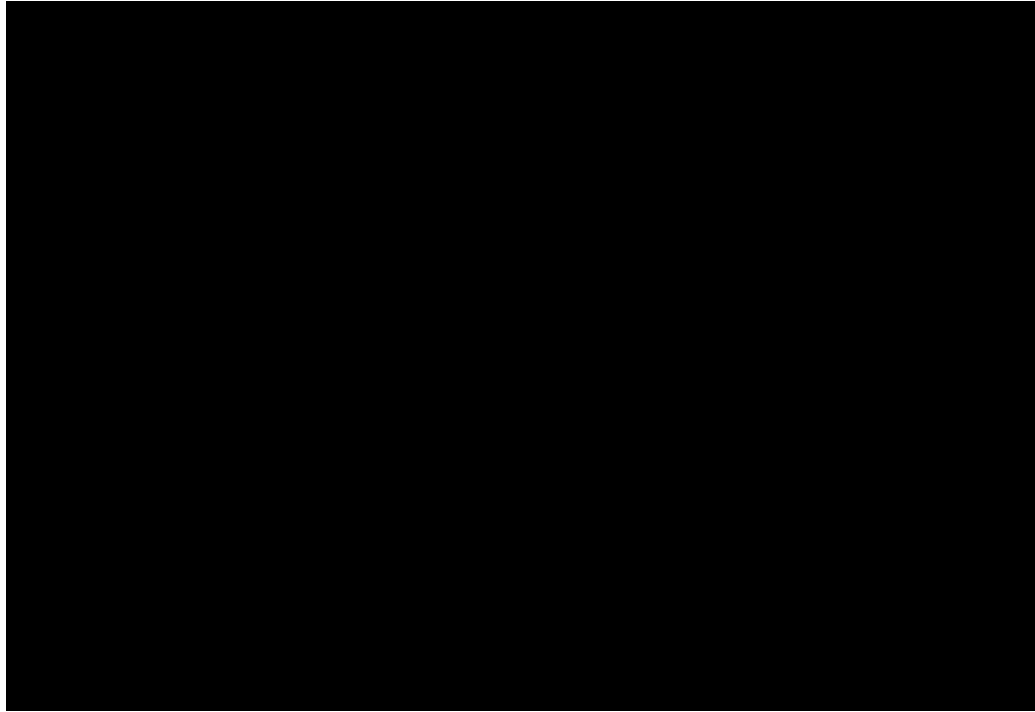


Figure 2.1. James Ravilious, 'Iddesleigh in high, dry summer', 1976, Parsonage Farm, Iddesleigh, Devon, reproduction from Morpurgo, pp. 24-25.

the high silvery floor of clouds' (*CP*, p. 524). Alice Oswald, who lives and works in Devon, has said that Hughes's Moortown sequence is where 'you really smell Devon [in his work] for the first time: the softer rhythms, the moisture, the sheer delight. You could almost call them clay-based poems, whereas previously they've been written on millstone grit.'³³ Oswald's geological analogy should certainly be taken with a pinch of salt – or even silt – but her description of a 'softer' quality in Hughes's Devon is evocative of Ravilious's description of his own treatment of the English landscape in his negatives.

Given the stylistic consistencies between Hughes and Ravilious, their partnership in Morpurgo's book takes on an aesthetic as well as a thematic dimension. The Moortown poem 'Last Load' introduces the month of June in *All Around the Year* and describes the frantic gathering of hay bales before a summer rain storm:

³³ Oswald, 'Wild-things'.

Your sweat tracks through your dust, your shirt flaps chill,
And bales multiply out of each other
All down the shorn field ahead.
The faster you fling them up, the more there are of them –
Till suddenly the field's grey empty. It's finished.

And a tobacco reek breaks in your nostrils
As the rain begins
Softly and vertically silver, the whole sky softly
Falling into the stubble all round you

The trees shake out their masses, joyful,
Drinking the downpour.
The hills pearled, the whole distance drinking
And the earth-smell warm and thick as smoke

And you go, and over the whole land
Like singing heard across evening water
The tall loads are swaying towards their barns
Down the deep lanes.

(CP, p. 529)

In Morpurgo's *All Around the Year*, a note on 'Hay' in the margin explains:

One of the two harvests of the summer months. Barley follows in August.
Although quantity is important, quality is just as vital. Continuous fine weather
is necessary so that the hay can be made quickly. The quicker it is made, the
better the quality.³⁴

Such thoughts echo Hughes's on writing the Moortown poems themselves: 'missing the moment', it would appear, can be as disastrous during haymaking as when drafting a poem, and as far as Hughes is concerned, for the farmer and the poet – both of whom are improvisers – speed implies quality. Hughes's language in 'Last Load' is lyrical as well as authentic, once again anticipating Ravilious's depictions of Devon by painting it in watercolour: 'Softly', 'silver', 'softly', 'pearled'.³⁵

³⁴ Morpurgo, p. 165.

³⁵ The title of Hughes's poem, 'Last Load,' evokes another tradition in rural art, and may be a reference to a motif in Victorian painting of a loaded hay cart being towed away by horses at the end of the day. One such renowned example is in John Linnell's Turner-esque 1875 painting also called *Last Load*. Commenting on this work, the art critic Tim Barringer, having identified georgic tropes in Linnell's *Harvest Moon* (1855) and *Reapers: Noon* (1865), observes that Linnell's 'dramatic orchestration' of a Surrey harvest scene is 'appropriate [...] to the onset of an apocalyptic modernisation that threatened to obliterate both the Surrey landscape and the traditional activities taking place within it': see Tim Barringer, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 111, 120, 129. The same could be said of Hughes's rendition of a similar scene of harvest time Devon in 1970s, with his

Yet Hughes's work reflects the approaches of Morpurgo and Ravilious in more profound ways. Morpurgo's diary entry for 'Sunday 26th June' provides a very different take on the task of haymaking. He writes about how the activity has little to do with 'the romantic associations that people imagine. There is the continuous rhythm of the baler picking up bailing and disgorging; the dust dries the throat and the string on the bales tears at the fingers.'³⁶ These sentiments, aiming to demystify agricultural toil, are consistent with Hughes's poem in such phrases as 'Your sweat tracks through your dust' and 'bales multiply out of each other'. For both Morpurgo and Hughes, farming is characterised by hard work, their words giving credence to the georgic condition of labour.

The georgic notion of work is where Hughes's, Morpurgo's and Ravilious's distinct yet related documentations of Devon most emphatically come together. The month of June features a number of photograph by Ravilious, some of mowing hay, but the most profound of these is a different kind of image with the title 'A Farming decision' (Figure 2.1). The picture features Ward family father and son in the farmhouse kitchen coming to a decision about haymaking, which, as Morpurgo reminds us, comes with a degree of risk. The face of John Ward (the father) is cast in shadow (the door is open); the son, Graham Ward, is holding what appears to be a notebook and a pen. It may be an aesthetically pleasing image – the shadow of the father, the illumination of the son – but its value primarily lies in the way it captures a moment of decision-making in a documentary fashion. In this way, Ravilious's unobtrusive camerawork accentuates such

painterly flourishes in the poem counterweighted against a more realist aesthetic. Hughes's poem 'The Harvest Moon' in *Season Songs* may be another homage to Linnell. Samuel Palmer's drawings, in particular 'Harvest Moon' (c. 1831-32), are another possible precedent, as Hughes's library includes an illustrated biography of Palmer by Raymond Lister (1974), gifted to him by Carol Hughes in 1975. Hughes's former library is searchable through the Emory University's online database: <<http://libraries.emory.edu>> [accessed 20 December 2017].

³⁶ Morpurgo, p. 167.

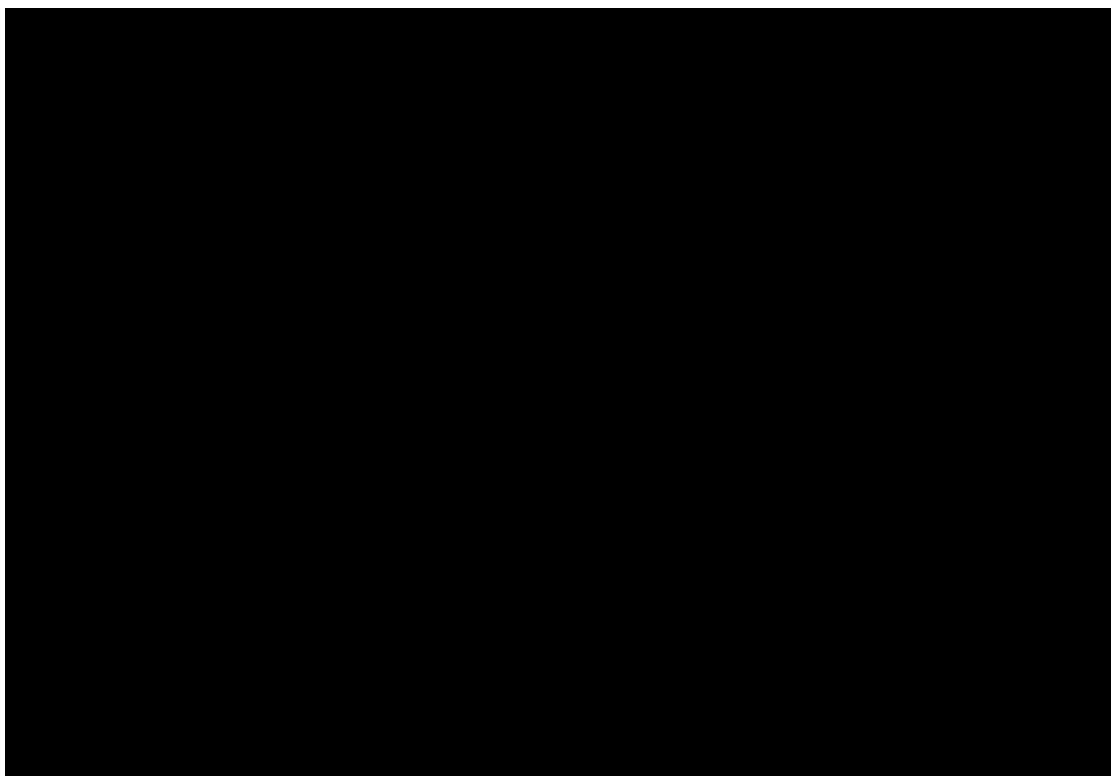


Figure 2.2. James Ravilious, 'A farming decision', June 1976, Nethercott, Iddesleigh, Devon, reproduction from *Morpurgo*, p. 167.

features in Hughes's poems, which also document the everyday trials and tribulations of managing a farm.

The connection between Hughes and Ravilious does not end with *All Around the Year*, and *Morpurgo* has not been the only one to associate their respective documentations of Devon. In the year 2000, a new edition of Ravilious's photographs was published with prose by Peter Beecham under the title 'Down the Deep Lanes', taken from the last line of Hughes's 'Last Load'. In the foreword, Candida Lycett-Green says that Hughes's poems and Ravilious's images show 'the ordinary, unsung side of the county' of Devon.³⁷ If Hughes is already documenting in *Moortown Elegies*, as Hadley

³⁷ Candida Lycett-Green, 'Foreword', Peter Beecham, *Down the Deep Lanes* (Devon: Devon Books, 2000), p. 9. Lycett-Green comments on the fact that throughout the book 'there are echoes of Eliot's description in *East Coker*': 'Now the light falls | Across the green [sic] field, leaving the deep lane | Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon', which could be another possible literary influence behind Hughes's poem: see T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker', *Poems*, ed. by Ricks and McCue, 2 vols, I, pp. 185-92 (p. 185). See also Edward Thomas's 'Bob's Lane' and 'Some day, I think, there will be people enough', which closes with the line: 'The Lane ends and once more all is the same': Edward Thomas, '[142]', *The Collected Poems and War Diary, 1917*, ed. by Peter Sacks (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. 132.

has it, then in the later *Moortown Diary* version documentary becomes the primary mode. Wilkinson claims that the georgic is not primarily a ‘didactic’ form of writing but ‘if the *Georgics* has to be assigned a *genre*, it is Descriptive Poetry.’³⁸ The format of *All Around the Year*, which combines didacticism and description in Morpurgo’s diary and notes as well as in the juxtaposition of poems and images, provides an important precedent for *Moortown Diary* in this respect. As the following section shows, the more Hughes interpreted his own poems as descriptive, the more he came to emphasise their political significance.

‘mid-Devon’s mud-lane annals’

Ravilious’s photographs in *All Around the Year*, taken on and around Parsonage Farm, form part of the Beaford archive hosted by Beaford Arts, a rural arts initiative based in North Devon. In 1972, Ravilious took on a commission from John Lane, the founder of Beaford Arts, to document and archive the area; in Lane’s words, the purpose was ‘to show north Devon people to themselves.’³⁹ He worked on the commission for seventeen years, from 1972 (the year Hughes bought Moortown Farm) to 1989 (the year Hughes published his sequence as *Moortown Diary*). The resulting archive of thousands of black and white images constitutes the most detailed and intimate rural record of its kind in the country, concentrating entirely on the area north of Dartmoor in Devon (some of the photographs were taken in Winkleigh, the village adjacent to Hughes’s farm). Ravilious’s depictions of Devon may be more extensive than Hughes’s poems about the area, but a comparison can be made between his archive and Hughes’s farming diary in that the motivations behind the two methods of documentation were the same.

³⁸ Wilkinson, pp. 3-4.

³⁹ Anon., ‘About the Archive’, *Beaford Archive* <<http://www.beaford-arts.org.uk/archive/page.php?id=1>> [accessed June 17, 2016].

A key aspect of the ‘local distinctiveness’ of both Hughes’s and Ravilious’s artistic projects in Devon is their ethnographic dimension. Ravilious’s work for the Beaford Archive does not simply fulfil the remit, as John Lane puts it, to ‘show Devon people to themselves’ but also presents the landscape and the culture of a specific area from the perspective of someone who was both an insider (an inhabitant of Devon themselves) and an outsider (a commissioned artist). Hughes’s project arose more organically but nevertheless serves a similar purpose, providing a verbal as opposed to a visual account of a distinctive, marginal, and increasingly threatened way of life.

In *Moortown Diary*, Hughes presents his poems in an anthropological context as documentations of Devon (he was, after all, a trained anthropologist, having studied the subject in his final year at Cambridge and nurtured the interest throughout his adult life).⁴⁰ In his ‘Preface’, he reflects on the cultural conditions in which he found himself when he first wrote the poems, recalling that in the 1970s ‘the ancient farming community in North Devon was still pretty intact and undisturbed, more so than anywhere else in England’ (*CP*, p. 1203). He speaks of the ‘isolated self-sufficiency of the old North Devon farmers’, remarking that they lived ‘in a time of their own’ (*CP*, p. 1203). Considering the isolated status of the farmers of North Devon, it is easy to see why this community might have appealed to Hughes. Cut off from the rest of the country, it represented as close to a so-called ‘indigenous’ culture as was possible in England at the time – one which Hughes could both participate in and draw inspiration from as a poet.

Hughes saw the community in Devon as distinct in not merely geographic terms but also temporal ones, explaining that the inhabitants were not necessarily living in the

⁴⁰ Hughes’s interest in anthropology has itself been well documented: see Stuart Herschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1981); Joanny Moulin, *Ted Hughes: New Selected Poems 1957-1994* (Paris: Didier-Érudition, 1999); Vanda Zajko, “‘Mutilated towards alignment?’: *Prometheus on his Crag* and the “Cambridge School” of Anthropology’, in *Ted Hughes and the Classics*, ed. by Rees, pp. 100-19; and Rand Brandes, ‘The Anthropologist’s Use of Myth’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Gifford, pp. 67-80. The library records at Emory University show that Hughes owned a number of ethnographic studies as well as an array of books on mythology and primitivism more generally.

past but that ‘all past centuries were still very present here, wide-open, unchanged, unexorcized, and potent enough to overwhelm any stray infiltrations of modernity’ (*CP*, p. 1203). Such an image of an ancient community is evocatively described by Hughes in poems in *Moortown Diary* that describe livestock markets – locations that provided for the poet/anthropologist a cross-section of the rural community. In the poem ‘She has come to pass’, farmers at a market are depicted as ‘the peninsula’s living gargoyles’ as they listen to an auctioneer’s ‘Epic appraisal || Of some indigenous cattle’ (*CP*, p. 521). This imagery is elaborated on in another poem, ‘The formal auctioneer’:

The weathered, rooty, bushy pile of faces,
A snaggle of faces
Like pulled-out and heaped-up old moots,
The natural root archives
Of mid-Devon’s mud-lane annals,
Watch and hide inside themselves
(*CP*, pp. 534-35)

In Devon, Hughes found the past alive in the present – an ancient culture almost entirely preserved that provided, importantly, an alternative to modernity. Just like the pond in which he fished for ‘Pike’ in Yorkshire as a young man, the valleys and lanes of Devon in the 1970s were for Hughes ‘as deep as England’ (*CP*, p. 85). Like the cattle about which they obsessed, in Hughes’s eyes the inhabitants of rural Devon were close to an ‘indigenous’ breed, cut off from the rest of the nation in terms of geography but also in terms of creed and even, controversially, of colour. The rooted language Hughes unearths to describe their faces in ‘The formal auctioneer’ is especially suited to and studied for the purpose. A ‘moot’ is a southern dialect word for a tree stump but more generally means a ‘meeting’ or ‘an assembly of people’ (*OED*). In this instance, Hughes’s educated, etymologically sensitive ear helps to root him in Devon, as he takes it upon himself to document a twentieth-century version of mid-Devon’s ‘annals’.

That being said, it is hard to ignore that in the poem Hughes’s imagery is less rooted than *uprooted*: ‘Like pulled-out and heaped-up old moots’. Indeed, the ancient

foundations upon which life was lived in Devon were seen by Hughes as increasingly fragile. His perspective on the Devon people as somehow ‘intact and undisturbed’ is one which is predicated on the threatened status of the group, for, as the anthropologist Tim Ingold has argued, ‘only by stressing their separate heritage can encapsulated groups express their difference’.⁴¹ The picture Hughes paints of the rural community and landscape of North Devon specifically is one which is increasingly under threat from what he saw as the pressures of modernity and homogenous states:

The farmers lived lightly in the day and the year but heavily in that long backward perspective of their ancient landscape and their homes. The breed was so distinct, so individualized and all of a piece, they seemed to me almost a separate race. I could believe they were still that Celtic tribe the Romans had known as the *Dumnoni* [sic], ‘the people of the deep valleys’, a confederacy of petty kings, hidden in their strongholds that were only just beginning to emerge out of the old oak forest.

(CP, p. 1203)

The ‘long backwards perspective’ is as much Hughes’s view of the farmers as it is their own, and the environment he describes resembles the typically Hughesian ‘primeval landscape’ as caricatured in Heaney’s essay on Hughes’s ‘Englands of the Mind’.⁴² Hughes habitually fostered sympathies for marginal communities, particularly those pushed into the far corners of England by invading forces. In the ‘prefatory note’ to *Remains of Elmet*, he describes the Calder Valley in Yorkshire ‘as the last ditch of Elmet, the last British Celtic kingdom to fall to the Angles’ (CP, p. 1200). Associating the Devon farmers with the tribal *Dumnonii*, Hughes finds the ancient England of his imagination very much alive and present, except this time the threat is not from imperial Rome but from the forces of globalisation, or, as he puts it, the ‘financial nightmares, the technological revolutions and international market madness that have devastated farmers, farms and farming ever since’ (CP, p. 1203-04). Such concerns highlight the proximity

⁴¹ Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000; repr. 2011), p. 151.

⁴² Heaney, ‘Englands of the Mind’, p. 151.

between the ethnographic and elegiac aspects of *Moortown Diary* as a record of a marginal perspective on the world – one which is in the process of being subsumed by what he saw as colonial (disguised as financial) forces.

As the above passage shows, Hughes's anthropological view of Devon is not without its own colonial perspective. Indeed, when Hughes proceeds to describe Devonian farmers as a separate 'breed' or even 'race', the politically reductive, even racist, question of othering (however imaginative) rears its ugly head and makes for uncomfortable reading, whether in 1989 or today. Nowhere in *Moortown Diary* is the link between the elegiac and the ethnographic more profound than in the series of elegies in memory of Jack Orchard which complete the sequence; however, nowhere else is Hughes's racial-profiling and othering more pronounced. In 'A Memory', Hughes casts Orchard in the second person:

Shearing under the East chill through-door draught
In the cave-dark barn, sweating and freezing –
Flame-crimson face, drum-guttural African curses
As you bundle the sheep

(CP, p. 535)

The tones of Orchard's 'drum-guttural African curses' resonate throughout the 'cave-dark barn' as Hughes paints a picture of the farmer rooted in the primitive, and by his own association, tribal Africa. Such imagery is echoed elsewhere throughout the sequence: in the description of Orchard's 'gangly long broad Masai figure' in 'Now you have to push' (CP, p. 536), and of his hands as 'nerveless, like an African's footsoles' in a poem entitled 'Hands' (CP, p. 537). In the prose note which accompanies 'A Memory', Hughes explains the context for such imagery and how his anthropological leanings (and learning) came to inform his relationship with, and representations of, his father-in-law. The note is worth quoting at length:

He spoke the Broadest Devonshire with a very deep African sort of timbre. Unlike the indigenous Devonians who seem to be usually short, and often thick-set, he was very tall, broad and gangly, with immense hands. His line of orchards came via Hartland, opposite the Isle of Lundy, which at one time was

held by Moorish seafarers (hence the Moriscoes), and blood-group factors evidently do reveal pockets of North African genes here and there along the North and South Cornwall and Devon coasts. The Hartland Orchards have a crest: a raven. That could easily be accounted for, I used to tell him, if they had originally been Moorish pirates. We treat it as joke, but for me it identified his essence.

(*CP*, p. 1211)

Rand Brandes has highlighted the ‘limitations and liabilities’ of Hughes’s ‘immersion in anthropological works’, especially in relation to the non-inclusion of the poem ‘Crowcolour’ from *Crow* (1970) in the United States versions of the collection – a poem which draws on myth and contains race-sensitive language.⁴³ Hughes’s orientalism and his appropriation of African stereotypes is certainly problematic on political as well as racial grounds. For Hughes, however, the association is positive, and highlights the lengths he is willing to go to in order to distinguish the farmers of Devon as a distinct culture within England.⁴⁴ In the case of Orchard, the farmer was in Hughes’s eyes not merely indigenous but exotic – a character whose ‘essence’, according to Hughes, was unconventional and otherworldly.⁴⁵ Orchard’s passing is symbolic for Hughes in that he is representative of the last of his kind – a sign that *agriculture* is under threat from *agribusiness*.

Hughes’s farming poems, and the elegies for Orchard in particular, are in one sense an attempt to historicise and preserve in poetry the details of a fast-fading culture. But they also look to the future, for the distinct set of circumstances Hughes found in rural Devon contained for him what he saw as ecological life lessons. The final argument of this chapter is that Hughes’s farming experiences, as reflected in the poems, was the

⁴³ Brandes, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁴ As Yvonne Reddick observes when commenting on the ‘ethnological’ aspects of Hughes’s ‘ecopoetry’: ‘if Hughes’s concept of indigenous people living in Palaeolithic Edens seems naïve to readers nowadays, we must remember that the texts by [Roderick] Haig-Brown and C.M. Bowra that he was reading in the early 1960s were current in their time. Indeed, Hughes’s nostalgia for aboriginal ways of life is a function of his dismay at modernity, with its consumerist values and sterile artificiality’: see Reddick, *Environmentalism and Ecopoet*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ It need not be explained why the carrion bird of the Orchards’ crest would have set off Hughes’s imagination.

making of him as an environmentalist, and that as well as elegies for, and documentations of, rural Devon, the poems of *Moortown Diary* hold ecological value. Moreover, Hughes's farming poems provide a unique opportunity to learn what is illuminated from an ecological standpoint by the perspective of poet who was, in a rare formulation, both a farmer and an environmental activist.

'Guardian spirit of the land and language'

As early as in 1981, Gifford and Roberts suggested how Hughes's poetry might alter perceptions of nature, arguing that in the case of the *Moortown* poems this ultimately derives from our admiration as readers 'of the uniquely human engagement in the creative-destructive processes of nature that farmers undertake in their daily work.'⁴⁶

Their assessment is worth repeating in this context because of the emphasis placed on the notion that farming is both creative *and* destructive, nurturing *and* damaging when it comes to the natural world, and that the farmer is involved in, and therefore responsible for, the process.

The ambivalent tone in Gifford and Roberts's assessment has come to be a hallmark of criticism on Hughes. In 1983, Robinson argued in relation to Hughes's poetry that 'it is the farm, *par excellence*, that is the meeting place of the two worlds, natural and human' but others have since felt the need to provide caveats when praising the ecological virtues of the farming material.⁴⁷ Scijag was among the first to read Hughes's work from an overtly ecocritical standpoint, arguing in 1994 that 'Hughes's poetry since the mid-1960s has been intimately concerned with viewing nature from an ecological perspective.'⁴⁸ Despite his reservations about Hughes's treatment of animals, he is also

⁴⁶ Gifford and Roberts, p. 251.

⁴⁷ Robinson, 'The Good Shepherd', p. 262.

⁴⁸ Scijag, p. 160.

keen to acknowledge the virtues of ‘care and stewardship’ in Hughes’s poetry.⁴⁹ More recently, Richard Kerridge has documented various ecocritical approaches relevant to Hughes’s work, but remains wary of accusations that environmentalists are ‘nostalgic for an idealised pre-industrial rural life’.⁵⁰ Having made this clear, Kerridge admits that ‘non-industrialised farming provides, as wild nature does, a theatre in which mortality can be seen in the context of ecological relations,’ and, echoing Webb, goes on to interpret ‘February 17th’ as an example of a poem that offers a form of ‘ecocritical consolation’.⁵¹ Lidström has also recently examined ‘the particular ideas about nature and environment that are expressed in [Hughes’s] poetry, and how these relate to contemporary developments of environmental thought.’⁵² She is another critic, however, for whom *Moortown Diary* stands out ‘by including a role for humans in the ecosystem’.⁵³

The question persists, then, of how to reconcile the misgiving of Hughes (and those of his critics) with his agricultural practices and poems. It is in this respect that the georgic as a critical tool can be usefully aligned with Hughes’s work. This is precisely what Yvonne Reddick comes to realise in a recently published and extensive overview of Hughes’s environmentalism. According to Reddick, when Hughes’s poems ‘focus on human beings’ agricultural labour, they are georgic. But when Hughes’s farming poetry is at its most environmentally aware, we could call it *eco-georgic*.’⁵⁴ To develop this idea further and return to the original coinage of the term ‘eco-georgic’ in an article by Fairer helps to reveal the precise way in which Hughes’s agricultural poetry holds value for – and beyond – environmental criticism. As Fairer articulates it, the ‘message’ of the eco-georgic ‘is that practical realities and negative pressures have to be negotiated in any truly

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 170

⁵⁰ Richard Kerridge, ‘Ecocritical Readings’, in *New Casebooks: Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 176-90 (p. 177).

⁵¹ Kerridge, pp. 179-180. See also, Webb, p. 39.

⁵² Lidström, p. 17.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 145.

⁵⁴ Reddick, *Environmentalism and Ecopoet*, p. 191.

committed ecology'.⁵⁵ Practical realities and negative pressures inform *Moortown Diary* on a number of levels, as it was written under no illusions that mankind is innately in harmony with the natural world. Hughes's ecological stance in the poems is not explicit; rather, implicit in his representations of scenes of animal husbandry, and the elegies for Orchard in particular, is the doggedness required to go up *against* nature. But this is always accompanied by a commitment and responsibility to other beings and phenomena. To inhabit the landscape in a georgic sense, then, is to embody a compromised position: as Hughes shows, to be *involved* can be difficult, complicated, and often depressing.

Any categorisation of Hughes's poems as examples of georgic writing inevitably places them in a didactic tradition. In 1981, Gifford and Roberts argued that because none of Hughes's poems can be regarded as final statements any 'didactic elements are therefore by their nature very suspect'.⁵⁶ Now that two decades have passed since Hughes's death, this statement is in need of re-evaluation. Following Chen Hong, Gifford has recently contested the idea that Hughes's work arrives at a scientific and didactic 'ecopoetry' in '1984 on "the Tarka Trail"', a poem which lambasts the pollution of the river Taw in Devon and contains the data-filled line: 'Three hundredweight of 20-10-10 to the acre' (*CP*, p. 843).⁵⁷ The poem is half-lament and half-protest poem, combining lyrical flourishes and metaphor – 'A bottleful is like sap' – with an uncompromising eye for detail and the prosaic itemisation of chemicals: 'Surfactants, ammonia, phosphates –

⁵⁵ Fairer, 'The World of Eco-Georgic', pp. 216-15.

⁵⁶ Gifford and Roberts, p. 62.

⁵⁷ Gifford, *Green Voices*, p. 11: see also Chen Hong, *Bestiality, Animality, and Humanity* (Wuhan: Central China Normal University Press, 2005), p. 222. Hughes had encountered Henry Williamson's *Tarka The Otter* (1927) in the library at Mexborough Grammar School in 1941 and he came to know it 'by heart' (*LTH*, p. 724). Hughes appears to have remained immune to the pollution of Williamson's political leanings, for, as Reddick has shown, his 'involvement in West Country river conservation was partly inspired by Williamson's evocation of Devon's wild places': see Yvonne Reddick, 'Henry Williamson and Ted Hughes: Politics, Nationhood, and Nature Writing', *English*, 62.239 (2013), 353-74 (p. 360). Hughes's settlement near the two rivers the Taw (the river in the poem) and the Torridge was even interpreted by Hughes himself as a tracing back to the source of his environmental awakenings in Yorkshire: 'my Mytholmroyd landscape, my Old Denaby landscape, & North Devon, all flowed into one' (*LTH*, p. 725).

the whole banquet | flushed in by sporadic thunderbursts' (*CP*, p. 842).⁵⁸ In response to the poem, Gifford raises the following questions: 'don't we need to know the data in our poetry? Don't we need to adjust our aesthetic to allow for the poetics to be informed[?]'.⁵⁹ Throughout '1984 on "The Tarka Trail"', however, there is the sense that Hughes is bringing his agricultural experiences as a farmer as well as his scientific expertise to bear on the polluted state of the Taw. The ratio '20-10-10', for instance, refers to fertiliser (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium) which is standard for livestock paddocks and pasture.

If, in *Moortown Diary*, Hughes says that the farmer's impression of their livestock is that they are 'patients', in '1984 on "The Tarka Trail"' it is the river who is presented in such terms:

But nothing can help the patient. In the August afternoon
The golden picnic sunrays, leaning dustily
Through the conifers, gaze down
At a ditch-carcass, a puddled horror –
Bile draining from rags, the hulk of ribs.
(*CP*, p. 842)

Nothing, not even poetry, can help the 'patient' this time. Whereas previously Hughes had described his own poems 'in their rags and tatters', here, the river is a carcass, but this time irrevocably damaged by agriculture. In this poem, the opposite of husbandry is hypocrisy: the transferred epithet of 'golden picnic sunrays' shines a light on the contrast between the countryside as perceived by holiday-makers and those who *know* the river. Leisure-seekers may be one thing, but Hughes does not shy away from the fact that the blame lies with farmers. In 1983, he contributed a chapter on the rivers 'Taw and Torridge' to Ann Voss Bark's book *West Country Fly Fishing*. Among a number of discarded paragraphs for the essay, now held in the archives at Emory University, Hughes

⁵⁸ Hughes became predisposed to protest poetry later in his career as he became more and more involved with environmental campaigns after he was made Poet Laureate in 1984. For specific works see 'If', *Rain Charm for the Duchy* (1992), and 'The Black Rhino'; for more on Hughes's campaigns see Reddick, *Environmentalism and Ecopoet*, pp. 245-67, 289-312.

⁵⁹ Gifford, *Green Voices*, p. 12.

writes of the present ‘difficulties’ for the nearby river ‘Torridge’ and ‘the particular kind of agriculture that dominates the river’s catchment’:

Because of the extreme poorness of the land (a good deal poorer than what flanks much of the Taw), the farms have to concentrate on livestock, which means grass, which means not only a yearly and often twice yearly dressing of Nitrates, but an increasing dependence on silage, which means slurry as well as milking parlours (detergent) and beef (abattoirs).⁶⁰

‘The growth of intensive farming, of this type’, he goes on to write, ‘has been startling to watch.’⁶¹ As a farmer local to the area, Hughes witnessed these changes first-hand, and though he contrasts the agriculture surrounding the Taw and Torridge in this instance, ‘1984 on “The Tarka Trail”’ shows the former river suffering the same fate (pun intended). Hughes’s role as poet/farmer may have given him a unique perspective on the threatened state of Devon’s rural community, but it also revealed to him modernity’s infiltration of traditional agriculture, and the damaging practices of the very same people Hughes sympathetically depicts in his farming poems of the 1970s.

For Gifford, Hughes’s use of hard data is a call for a scientifically informed poetry appropriate for a response to environmental disaster. A second look at the poem, however, shows the scientific expertise on display in its lines as suspect. For Hughes, hard science is also often ‘hired science’ – an untrustworthy source of information as well as ethics. Standing behind the corrupt figure of the seemingly ‘good corn farmer’ is ‘The

⁶⁰ Ted Hughes, ‘Taw and Torridge’, in *West Country Fly Fishing*, 1983, Atlanta, Georgia, Emory University Stuart A. Rose Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Library, The Ted Hughes Papers, Mss. 644, series 2, subseries 2.4d, box 115, ff. 1, [B121], MS and TS. Hughes had been aware of the damage done to waterways by modern agricultural practices from early on in his life. In a note to the *Three Books* (1993) version of his *River* sequence, he recalls how his ‘lifeline’ had been an old oxbow of the Don in South Yorkshire, ‘full of fish and waterfowl’: ‘One day (early 1940s) I saw all the fish in this lake bobbing their mouths at the surface: the beginning of the end, as it turned out. That same day I noticed a strange ruddy vein in the ditch water that drained from the farm buildings, two or three hundred yards away. And I registered a new smell. I traced the vein to a big stone shed, packed with sodden, dark-stained grass – reeking the new smell. It was the first silage’ (*CP*, p. 1211).

⁶¹ Hughes continues: ‘The five hundred or more farms of the area are the five hundred sources of the Torridge: eighty gallons of detergent a day, from each hundred cow parlour, lubricating the system. As if this were not enough, oozing into every brooklet of fry, the end product, the cattle and the sheep, are drained of their fluids and refuse at Hatherleigh abattoir on the Lew (one of the Porridge’s spawning tributaries) and the giant abattoir at Torrington — one of the biggest in Europe’: Hughes, ‘Taw and Torridge’. 1. I am grateful to Mark Wormald and Terry Gifford for bringing this archival material to my attention.

confrontational divisions between groups are absolutely excluded, and the assumption made that country people need to learn as much as townspeople. Somehow the country as it operates has to be understood as an asset for everybody—not as something to be trampled on but as something that exists with that way of life and that duty of curatorship over everything in it.⁶²

Such comments are in line with Hughes's role as the president of the Morpurgos' charity, which continues to enlighten urban children on the practicalities of farm life and in turn to open up the countryside and rural community to the urban population.

They are also line with his role as a poet: in an address given in memory of Hughes at a Memorial Service held at Westminster Abbey in 1999, Heaney described Hughes as 'a guardian spirit of the land and of language,' remarking that

Utter sympathy with everything that wanted to live came naturally to [Hughes] [...] from [his] perception of the struggle at the heart of things – a struggle in the soil as well as in the soul – the abiding at-oneness of all his work derives [...] This instinct for wholeness and harmony made him a great poet laureate as well, for he had an almost Indo-European sense of the necessary consonance between the good of the land and the good standing of its bard [...] He internalised the historical crises of the British nation and the ecological crises of planet earth. He took on the grief of the generation that preceded him, the generation bound to the dead of the First World War, and transformed it into a healer's vision. And there was something homeopathic about his celebration of plants and creatures, since the poems were reminders that we are all part of the same fabric, woven out of and into the palpable, mysterious universe.⁶³

The 'land' and 'language' are for Heaney part of a whole in Hughes's work – part of a 'struggle' that finds its most complete expression, as chapters I and II have demonstrated, in Hughes's poems about agriculture. Nevertheless, it is a struggle that also facilitates a sense of 'at-oneness': a perspective on the environment that is predicated on the idea of harmony, but a harmony that is unstable and fragile and the condition of which is work. By the time that Heaney had made these comments, he had come to realise the same lessons for himself. It was only later in his own career that Heaney would come to

⁶² Ted Hughes, 'Countryside Movement,' 1 folder, London, British Library, Edward James Hughes Papers, ADD Ms. 88918/121/2.

⁶³ Seamus Heaney, 'A Great Man and a Great Poet', *Observer*, 16 May 1999 <<https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/1999/may/16/featuresreview.review2>> [accessed 20 December 2017]; the article takes the form of an extract from Heaney's address.

acknowledge that Hughes's influence upon him had been agricultural as well as literary, that the message at the heart of Hughes's poetry had been georgic.

CHAPTER III

‘Raggle-Taggle’: Beyond Pastoral in Early Seamus Heaney

This corner of the farmyard I like most:
As well as any bloom upon a flower
I like the dust on nettles

Edward Thomas, ‘Tall Nettles’¹

All of our habitat is relevant: not just the pretty bits.

Tim Dee²

In a 1975 review of John Barrell and John Bull’s *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, Seamus Heaney remarks that ‘pastoral’ is a term ‘that has been extended in usage until its original meaning has been largely eroded’, adding:

For example, I have occasionally talked of the countryside where we live in Wicklow as being pastoral rather than rural, trying to impose notions of a beautified landscape on the word, in order to keep ‘rural’ for the unselfconscious face of raggle-taggle farmland.³

For Heaney, the erosion and extension of the ‘original meaning’ of the term pastoral (the life of shepherds and their depiction in art and writing) inhibits his own usage. If the pastoral now has a much wider application, then Heaney makes a concerted effort to linguistically cordon off sections of the landscape from its reach. The poet’s self-awareness and to some extent self-criticism of his inclination to ‘impose notions of a beautified landscape on the word’ suggests that he is equally wary of the ways in which the word imposes such notions on the land itself. If Heaney had his way, then farmland, as opposed to ‘countryside’, would remain beyond the realms of literary convention.

¹ Edward Thomas, ‘Tall Nettles’, *The Collected Poems and War Diary, 1917*, p. 111.

² Tim Dee, ‘Introduction’, *Ground Work: Writing on Places and People*, ed. by Tim Dee (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), pp. 1-14 (p. 6).

³ Seamus Heaney, ‘In the Country of Convention’, *Preoccupations*, pp. 173-80 (p. 173); originally published in *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 July 1975.

In contrast to the pastoral, Heaney employs the term ‘rural’ to conjure up the image of a more ‘unselfconscious’ type of terrain.⁴ In another essay from *Preoccupations*, this time on the subject of ‘The Sense of Place’, Heaney proposes:

there are two ways in which a place is known and cherished, two ways which may be complementary but which are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious. In the literary sensibility, both are likely to co-exist in a conscious and unconscious tension[.]⁵

The same might also be said of the pastoral: in Heaney’s formulation, the pastoral corresponds to the unlived and the literary, and the rural to the lived and the illiterate: both are ways of knowing and cherishing a landscape. Heaney may desire to ‘keep’ aspects of the countryside from the reach of the pastoral in an ‘unselfconscious’ way, but with an awareness of the literary inevitably comes the self-consciousness of his desire to escape it.⁶ As with his ‘sense of place’, the poet’s sense of the pastoral and the rural co-exist in a conscious and unconscious tension. This chapter examines a third way in which Heaney writes about the land, one that arises out of the tension between the pastoral and rural, and that to some extent is able to reconcile conflicting ways of knowing and writing about farmland: the georgic. If, for Heaney, the pastoral holds too many purely literary associations – ones that also compromise his sense of the rural – then the argument of the following chapter is that the georgic is well pitched to accommodate both the lived and the literary in his work.

⁴ If not County Wicklow, by ‘raggle-taggle farmland’ it is likely Heaney means the area in which he grew up in County Derry in Northern Ireland. Heaney moved with his family from Belfast to a cottage south of the border in Wicklow in 1972. For more on the implications of this move, see below (pp. 170-71).

⁵ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Sense of Place’, *Preoccupations*, pp. 131-49 (p. 131).

⁶ In an interview with Michael Huey, Heaney responds to Robert Frost’s maxim that ‘poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom,’ by replying: ‘I would say that it begins in delight and ends in self-consciousness. I don’t know whether that’s wisdom or not;’ see Michael Huey, ‘An Interview with Seamus Heaney’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 January 1980, pp. 16-17 (p. 16). Elsewhere, he remarks that with the publication of his first volume, *Death of a Naturalist*, there was ‘a new self-consciousness’, before stating that when it came to him embarking on his second collection, *Door into the Dark* (1969), there ‘wasn’t enough self-forgetfulness’, adding that ‘the one simple requirement – definition even – of lyric writing is self-forgetfulness;’ see Dennis O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 61, 88. For more on the self-consciousness of Heaney’s early work, see Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), pp. 13-37, and Mark Bauer, “‘It was still all me:’ Self-Forgetful Autobiography in Seamus Heaney’s *Death of a Naturalist*”, *Textual Practice*, 32 (2016), 1-19.

Barrell and Bull may have proclaimed in 1975 that pastoral poetry in England is now a ‘lifeless form’, but as far as poetry in Ireland is concerned commentators have taken a divergent view.⁷ As Donna L. Potts confirms in her monograph on the subject, the pastoral tradition ‘has long had a unique place in Ireland’. According to the current critical consensus this continues to be the case, with Heaney’s poetry at the heart of a number of recent investigations into the persistence and vitality of the mode in post-war Irish and Northern Irish poetry.⁸ In her introduction, Potts highlights the political contexts surrounding recent pastoral poetry written in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, explaining how ‘their shared history results in similar critiques of colonialism, industrialization, and modernization, and also gives them a common literary tradition—one that is uniquely shaped by ancient Irish literature’.⁹ She goes on to acknowledge how Ireland’s partition in 1921 ‘meant that to some extent, pastoral traditions of North and South evolved differently’, with the North being industrialised ‘more rapidly and extensively’ than the South.¹⁰ In Heaney’s early poetry, the distinction leads him to write poems which arguably go beyond the borders of the tradition altogether.

Heaney may not have agreed with Barrell and Bull’s claim that with the rise of the ‘Factory Farm’ the term pastoral is ‘now almost devoid of any meaning’, but he does demonstrate an awareness of the limitations of its meaning – that there remains a stretch of terminological hinterland between pastoral and rural in an Irish context, and especially

⁷ Barrell and Bull, p. 432.

⁸ Ibid., p. 433. Potts, p. 3. Pott’s reading of Heaney’s pastorals in particular is informed and inspired by both Bradley, and Sydney Burris’s *Poetry of Resistance: Seamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991), as well as Oona Frawley in *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Dublin; Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2005). See also Hart, *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions*, pp. 9-31, Tyler, pp. 31-73, and Twiddy. Heaney is also a key figure for Terry Gifford in his theorising of the pastoral as a writer whose renown and popularity is ‘testimony to the continuing need for pastoral poetry that returns to speak to contemporary concerns’: see Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 98.

⁹ Potts, p. 12. Oona Frawley is in agreement with Potts when she writes about the pastoral in Ireland: ‘For a colonized people and, subsequently, for a post-colonial nation, the pastoral form must, I suggest, be fundamentally different in this crucial way: the homesickness explicit in pastoral nostalgia does not function merely as a literary device, but as a political tool, a way of commenting on social circumstance’: see Oona Frawley, ‘Kavanagh and the Irish Pastoral Tradition’, in *Patrick Kavanagh*, ed. by Stan Smith (Dublin; Portland, OR.: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 72-92 (p. 77.)

¹⁰ Potts, p. 12.

in a Northern Irish context.¹¹ In his early poems, which evoke the rural environment of Country Derry in Northern Ireland, Heaney goes beyond the pastoral in his representations of the land and its people. Over the course of the collections *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), and *Field Work* (1979), he writes of a traditional way of life under threat from modernisation and a landscape that is increasingly and irrevocably marked by colonialism and civil strife, both past and present. To accurately document the rural environment of his upbringing, therefore, Heaney concentrates on both the traditional and neglected features of the countryside – its thatched roofs and its barbed wire.

Later in his career, Heaney articulated a sustained defence of the ‘staying power’ of pastoral poetry, arguing that the mode’s literary self-consciousness is precisely what guarantees its endurance: ‘the pastoral requires at least a minimal awareness of tradition on the part of both the poet and the audience’.¹² If Heaney came to think this of the pastoral, then what of the georgic? Does it, according to Heaney, possess the same ‘staying power’ as the pastoral in contemporary poetry? Heaney only tangentially acknowledges the georgic in his response to Barrell and Bull (who dedicate space to the tradition in their own discussion). Throughout his review, he makes a point of highlighting the limitations of their overtly Marxist approach to the pastoral (which, as he explains, is also the approach of Raymond Williams in *The Country and City*), suggesting that more attention needs to be given to the poems in a formal sense as ‘made things’, as ‘self-delighting buds on the old bough of tradition’.¹³ No such corrective is provided for the ‘English Georgic’, which Heaney characterises offhandedly as ‘rousing advice to gentleman-farmers’.¹⁴

¹¹ Barrell and Bull, p. 432.

¹² Heaney, ‘Eclogues “In Extremis”’, p. 1.

¹³ Barrell and Bull, pp. 297-299; Heaney, ‘In the Country of Convention’, p. 174.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Heaney did come to acknowledge the importance of the georgic in an Irish context (chapter V will focus on the self-conscious development of the georgic in late Heaney), but when it comes to his early poetry there is scant evidence that he saw it as compatible with his own approach. The purpose of this chapter is to show that, despite his early misgivings and regardless of his own requirements for writing classical modes, Heaney engaged with the georgic long before he articulated any in-depth knowledge of or admiration for it. The following pages show that while Heaney may have dismissed historical examples of the mode in English – the reasons for his doing so, as we shall see, being entirely valid – it did reach him through the influence of poets such as John Clare, Patrick Kavanagh, and Edward Thomas – to name a few. By drawing attention to the ‘raggle-taggle’ features of Heaney’s early agricultural poems, and in the process uncovering their georgic qualities, it becomes apparent that the poet’s commitment to the overlooked – places and people – enables him to address some of the most pressing questions of his time.

The Matter of Ireland

In the second of two collected essays on the post-revival Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh, Heaney writes of the impact of coming across Kavanagh’s work for the very first time, and his delight at subject matter he recognised as authentically rural:

When I found ‘Spraying the Potatoes’ in the old *Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, I was excited to find details of a life which I knew intimately – but which I had always considered to be below or beyond books – being presented in a book. The barrels of blue potato spray which had stood in my own childhood like holidays of pure colour in an otherwise grey field-life – they were there, standing their ground in print.¹⁵

¹⁵ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh’, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp. 3-14 (p. 7). As Heaney mentions, it was his mentor in Belfast Michael McLaverty who first lent him a copy of Kavanagh’s 1947 collection *A Soul for Sale* in the early 1960s, containing the poem ‘Spraying the Potatoes’ as described here (p. 7).

Details such as Kavanagh's 'barrels of blue potato spray' – examples of what Heaney terms 'the unregarded data of the usual life' – provide a refreshing counterpart to the 'hygienic and self-aware pleasure of the text' such as that found in pastoral poetry.¹⁶ It is striking that the barrels add colour to what might otherwise be regarded as a 'grey field-life', and that the ugliness of the contemporary is what helped to make Kavanagh's poetry 'new, authentic and liberating' for Heaney.¹⁷ The notion that they are 'standing their ground' further suggests that Kavanagh is doing so too, by not conforming to generic convention, and by including within his poem elements that are unapologetically – to put it in Heaney's terms – 'raggle-taggle'.

Despite writing many poems that qualify as being conventionally pastoral, Kavanagh has elsewhere been identified as a writer belonging to an antipastoral heritage stretching back to writers such as Stephen Duck and John Clare, especially in his well-known, extended poem 'The Great Hunger' (1942).¹⁸ According to Jonathan Allison, by acknowledging 'sweat, pain and deprivation', Kavanagh's poem is antipastoral in the sense that it undermines the 'sentimental depictions of peasant life as popularised by writers of the [Anglo/Irish] Revival'.¹⁹ In his review of Barrell and Bull, Heaney recommends Kavanagh's 'The Great Hunger' as an example of the antipastoral, and his reaction to 'Spraying the Potatoes' would appear to corroborate this view.²⁰ Indeed,

¹⁶ Heaney, 'The Placeless Heaven', pp. 7-8.

¹⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'From Monaghan to the Grand Canal: The Poetry of Patrick Kavanagh', *Preoccupations*, pp. 113-30 (p. 116).

¹⁸ Heaney, 'In the Country of Convention', p. 180: see also Jonathan Allison, 'Patrick Kavanagh and the Antipastoral', in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 42-58, and Gifford, *Pastoral*, pp. 120, 128-32.

¹⁹ Allison, pp. 43-45. For an authoritative and more complicated account of how Kavanagh's engagement with pastoral traditions is related to what is known as the Irish Literary Revival see Frawley, 'Kavanagh and the Irish Pastoral Tradition', pp. 77-91.

²⁰ In 2005, in a review of Kavanagh's posthumous *Collected Poems*, Heaney refers to 'The Great Hunger' as an 'anti-pastoral masterpiece': see Seamus Heaney, 'Strangeness and Beauty', review of Patrick Kavanagh, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Antoinette Quinn (2004), *Guardian*, 1 January 2005 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jan/01/poetry>> [accessed 11 June 2018].

Allison's assessment of Kavanagh echoes Heaney's own description of antipastoral poetry as poetry in which 'sweat and pain and deprivation are acknowledged'.²¹

'I have no need to write a poem to Patrick Kavanagh; I wrote *Death of a Naturalist*', Heaney is reported to have said according to Michael Allen.²² As Henry Hart has observed, *Death of a Naturalist* bears a strong resemblance to the 'antipastoral accents' of Kavanagh: the environments of the poems are populated by rats ('The Barn', 'An Advancement of Learning') and often their subject matter either turns foul ('Blackberry Picking,' 'Churning Day') or threatening ('Death of a Naturalist').²³ More emphatically still, in 'At a Potato Digging' Heaney can be seen to continue Kavanagh's efforts to depict rural realities as experienced by Irish agricultural labourers:

A mechanical digger wrecks the drill,
Spins up a dark shower of roots and mould.
Labourers swarm in behind, stoop to fill
Wicker creels. Fingers go dead in the cold.

Like crows attacking crow-black fields, they stretch
A higgledy line from hedge to headland;²⁴

Heaney's description of a 'higgledy line' of labourers following the devastation of the 'mechanical' potato harvester follows the image found at the beginning of Kavanagh's 'The Great Hunger', which opens with the lines:

Clay is the word and clay is the flesh
Where the potato-gatherers like mechanized scare-crows move

²¹ Heaney, 'In the Country of Convention', p. 176. For Barrell and Bull, the antipastoral is a 'corrective' to the established mode, as they put it: 'a refusal to pastoralize, to idealize, the agricultural labourer on any terms': see Barrell and Bull, pp. 377-381 (p. 379). For a similar definition see Gifford, *Pastoral*, p. 120. Allison provides the following useful overview in his essay on Kavanagh and the antipastoral: 'Traditionally, pastoral is a matter of rural life and shepherds, idyllic landscapes in which people corrupted by court and city life are changed and renewed. It suggests a healing antithesis to the corrupting influence of urban experience, but has been characterised simply as poetry of the countryside (however defined), and does not always envision an idealised and falsified, conflict-free zone, transcending the tensions of history, though it can do that, too. 'Antipastoral', on the other hand, suggests a poetics of undermining, in which pastoral conventions are deployed or alluded to, in order to suggest or declare the limitations of those conventions, or their downright falsity. If pastoral suggests that rural life offers freedom, antipastoral may proclaim it is a prison-house, and the farmers slaves' (Allison, p. 42).

²² Michael Allen, 'Provincialism and Recent Irish Poetry: The Importance of Patrick Kavanagh', *Two Decades of Irish Writing: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Douglas Dunn (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1975), pp. 23-36 (p. 35).

²³ Hart, p. 21. Hart also notes the antipastoral influence of John Clare and Ted Hughes.

²⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'At a Potato Digging', *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 20-22 (p. 18).

Along the far-side of the hill – Maguire and his men.²⁵

In Heaney's poem, Kavanagh's earlier description is churned up and scattered among the lines: the industrial metaphor of 'mechanized scare-crows' is echoed by Heaney in his 'mechanical digger' progressing over 'crow-black fields', while Kavanagh's automata-like potato gatherers themselves come to resemble a flock of scavenging crows.

And yet, 'At a Potato Digging' is doing more than simply recycling Kavanagh's material. According to Thomas O'Grady, despite the fact that both Kavanagh's and Heaney's poems represent a 'direct and uncompromising challenge to the romanticised notions of Irish peasant life popularised by Ireland's literary and cultural renaissance of the early twentieth century', Heaney's assimilation of Kavanagh's imagery is symptomatic of the 'ambiguous nature' of his relationship with the poetry of his predecessor.²⁶ Indeed, Heaney himself pointed out how Kavanagh 'came to dislike his most celebrated poem', putting this down to the fact that he 'was the least political of poets, consistently in flight from what he regarded as the fake importance of the public themes'.²⁷ Heaney draws on and is attracted to the antipastoral aspects of 'The Great Hunger', yet there is also the sense that, for him, Kavanagh's poem paints an incomplete picture, and that the retreat from politics and history explicit in most pastoral poetry is still part of the equation. 'The "matter of Ireland", mythic, historical or literary', he argues in an earlier essay on Kavanagh, 'forms no significant part of his material'.²⁸

In order to nuance his own version of Kavanagh, and make the subject his own, Heaney sources material from yet another *The Great Hunger* in the form of Cecil

²⁵ Patrick Kavanagh, 'The Great Hunger', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Antoinette Quinn (London: Allen Lane, 2004), pp. 63-89, (p. 63).

²⁶ Thomas B. O'Grady, "'At a Potato Digging': Seamus Heaney's Great Hunger', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 16:1 (July 1990), 48-58 (pp. 50-51).

²⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'Poet to Poet: Seamus Heaney on Patrick Kavanagh', *Listener*, 2854 (19 April 1984), 14.

²⁸ Heaney, 'From Monaghan to the Grand Canal', p. 115. For the political dimension of Kavanagh's early work and their relation to Heaney see Thomas B. O'Grady, 'Poetics and Polemics: The Politics of Patrick Kavanagh's "Spraying the Potatoes"', *Colby Quarterly*, 31.4 (December 1995), 242-52.

Woodham-Smith's 1962 history of the Irish Famine.²⁹ While 'At a Potato Digging' appears at first to be built on the foundation of the speaker's memory, as it progresses its temporal frame of reference becomes much wider, reaching as far back as the Great Irish Famine of 1845-52:

Processional stooping through the turf

Rekurs mindlessly as autumn. Centuries
Of fear and homage to the famine god
Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,
Make a seasonal altar of the sod.³⁰

The use of the term 'sod' is in line with its meaning as 'a piece or slice of earth'; yet it might also refer to its dialect usage in Ireland as 'one's district or native country', while at the same time somewhat ambiguously hinting at other derogatory denotations (*OED*).

Kavanagh's Maguire was the man who resentfully 'made the field his bride', and Heaney's labourers appear to submit themselves in habitual motions that resemble the procession of a religious ceremony.³¹ The echo, however, is not a mindless recurrence, and Heaney's attitude towards the 'matter of Ireland' in his poem could be characterised as neither dismissive nor resentful. 'Good smells exude from the crumbled earth,' writes Heaney in the second part of the poem, as he describes the potatoes themselves, 'whose solid feel, whose wet insides | promise taste of ground and root'.³² Here, Heaney unearths a register sourced not from Kavanagh but from Edward Thomas, who proclaims in one of two 'Digging' poems: 'It is enough | To smell, to crumble the dark earth'.³³

²⁹ Though Kavanagh's poem does not directly reference the famine, the poet did claim upon the release of Woodham-Smith's book that the title had been stolen from his poem: see *Patrick Kavanagh: Collected Poems*, ed. by Quinn, p. 268. O'Grady has demonstrated how certain passages in Woodham-Smith's book anticipate the details in Heaney's poem: see O'Grady, 'Seamus Heaney's Great Hunger', p. 40. In *Death of a Naturalist*, 'At a Potato Digging' is followed by another poem on the subject of famine, 'For the Commander of the *Eliza*', the epigraph to which is taken from Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger*.

³⁰ Heaney, 'At a Potato Digging', p. 20.

³¹ Kavanagh, 'The Great Hunger', p. 65.

³² Heaney, 'At a Potato Digging', p. 21.

³³ Edward Thomas, 'Digging [1]', *The Collected Poems and War Diary, 1917*, pp. 62-63. In the 1960s, McLaverty encouraged Heaney to read not only Kavanagh but also Thomas, and, according to Edna Longley, Heaney's own poem called 'Digging' 'contains evidence that the introduction mattered': see Edna Longley, *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2017), pp. 279-80. I return to the georgic influence of Thomas on Heaney in chapter IV.

Roughly a year after writing ‘Digging’, and shortly before the poet departed for the Western Front during the First World War (where he would be killed during the Arras ‘offensive’ on 9 April 1917), Thomas was apparently confronted by Eleanor Farjeon with a question: ““Do you know what you are fighting for?” He stopped, and picked up a pinch of earth: “Literally for this”. He crumpled it between his finger and his thumb and let it fall.’³⁴ Stan Smith points out how ‘literal it wasn’t, of course’, and proceeds to read the gesture as a metonymic reduction relating to Thomas’s national identity.³⁵ As in Thomas’s writing, so in Heaney’s poetry too there is a great deal at stake in the unearthing of such ‘matter’: ‘good smells’ relate to good feelings, and though Heaney, unlike Thomas, did not write his lines under war conditions, there is still a sense that the soil itself symbolises more than ‘the “matter of Ireland”, mythic, historical or literary’.

Seasonal cycles, scenes of labour, manual details, sensations, rituals: though the tone of ‘At a Potato Digging’ may appear straightforwardly antipastoral, as it progresses Heaney introduces outside elements. In the final section, he offers his present-day labourers a moment of relief:

Under a gay flotilla of gulls
The rhythm deadens, the workers stop.
Brown bread and tea in bright canfuls
Are served for lunch. Dead-beat, they flop

Down in the ditch and take their fill,
Thankfully breaking timeless fasts;
Then, stretched on the faithless ground, spill
Libations of cold tea, scatter crusts.³⁶

The gesture – and it remains unclear whether the act is done knowingly by the labourers or merely interpreted this way by the poet – is presented as both casual and fearful: in one sense it resembles a form of pagan sacrifice to ‘the famine god,’ while in another it is a

³⁴ Eleanor Farjeon, *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 154.

³⁵ Stan Smith, ““Literally, for this”: Metonymies of National Identity in Edward Thomas, Yeats and Auden”, in *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*, ed. by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 113-34 (p. 113).

³⁶ Heaney, ‘At a Potato Digging’, p. 22.

sign that these labourers are not themselves starving and can afford to cast off their crusts. There is a tangible notion in these lines that an engagement with the ground has the capacity to be redemptive, and that the nourishing of the earth over generations has ensured that it too provides nourishment. Heaney's labourers may themselves physically resemble the victims of famine – 'Dead-beat,' 'stretched on the faithless ground' – but 'thankfully' they fare better than their ancestors. In Heaney's poem, Kavanagh's bright barrels of potato spray become 'tea in bright canfuls [...] served for lunch', their dash of colour bringing the poem up-to-date while also illustrating the speaker's fondness for the scene, however tainted by history.³⁷

In 'At a Potato Digging', then, Heaney's attitude to the land is 'neither gluttonous nor starved', as he puts it himself in a poem entitled 'Land' in his third collection, *Wintering Out*.³⁸ Indeed, it would appear that right from beginning his own agricultural stance is more nuanced than a pastoral/antipastoral dialectic might allow. Citing Heaney's initial 'aversion, or at least ambivalence', toward the examples of his classical predecessors, namely Theocritus and Virgil, Henry Hart points out how the precise way in which Heaney fits into the pastoral tradition 'can be as perplexing to Heaney as to his critics'.³⁹ Based on the ambivalence of 'At a Potato Digging', the same case can be made with regard to Heaney's attitude to the antipastoral, for, as Frawley maintains, the identification of Kavanagh's poetry as typically antipastoral must not mask the fact that he therefore engages with the pastoral itself, albeit a distinctly Irish brand of the mode. In Heaney's work, the trauma of Ireland's past may mean that, wherever 'potato diggers are,

³⁷ By making this claim, I do not wish to undermine the poem's more troubling aspects. As Corcoran observes: 'the poem's quasi-Catholic rituals make it clear how deeply the sufferings of Irish historical experience are inscribed in the landscape itself and in the human psyche': see Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 26-27.

³⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Land', *Wintering Out* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 21-22 (p. 21).

³⁹ Hart, *Poet of Contrary Progressions*, pp. 9-10. Bradley has also commented upon 'the ambivalent nature of realistic pastoral' in the work of Heaney (Bradley, p. 90). Likewise, Davis identifies the continuation of Heaney's 'ambivalent pastoralism' in the later collection *Electric Light* (2001), emphasising his desire to 'reconcile' his 'sense of the actual in his use of the rural language' with the 'distance from the actual world' which is implied by the pastoral: see Davis, pp. 100-15.

| you still smell the running sore', but 'At a Potato Digging' also suggests the possibility of a healing process through the virtues of good husbandry, or, to put it in Virgilian terms, a sense of *patria*.⁴⁰ The georgic, though related to the pastoral and the antipastoral, asks different questions of the land, and, crucially, provides different answers. It makes sense, therefore, to think of 'At a Potato Digging' as an early example of Heaney's poetry traversing the boundaries of the pastoral into the georgic.

It is no coincidence that Heaney's most explicitly antipastoral early poem should also be his most proto-georgic. A closer look at his interpretation of the antipastoral tradition shows how Heaney's understanding is informed by the georgic preoccupations of past writers. In 1975, Heaney states that it 'will not do to haul the academic net and mention peasant poets like John Clare and or Stephen Duck' but it is precisely in the company of these writers that he casts Kavanagh as an antipastoral poet in his review of Barrell and Bull, written the very same year.⁴¹ For Heaney, in Duck and Clare together 'there emerges a voice [...] protesting on behalf of the agricultural labourer'.⁴² Moreover, according to Heaney, this voice is just as much in protest against the conventions of the 'English georgic' as it is of the platitudes of the pastoral.⁴³

Heaney is not alone in this observation. Critics have argued that Duck's most well-known poem, the archetypally antipastoral *The Thresher's Labour* (1730), is profoundly influenced by Augustan georgic conventions prevalent in eighteenth century English poetry. Morag Shiach has commented on how *The Thresher's Labour* 'is not a pastoral poem, although much of its descriptive vocabulary is drawn from the pastoral tradition'. She goes on to claim that neither is it really a georgic poem, 'since it does not celebrate the productive power of labour', suggesting instead that it is perhaps best

⁴⁰ Heaney, 'At a Potato Digging', p 21.

⁴¹ Heaney, 'From Monaghan to the Grand Canal', p. 115.

⁴² Heaney, 'In the Country of Convention', p. 179-80.

⁴³ Ibid.

understood as ‘anti-georgic’.⁴⁴ Bridget Keegan has also highlighted the poem’s ambiguity, emphasising how it can be referred to as ‘pastoral, anti-pastoral, counter-pastoral, georgic, anti-georgic, or plebeian georgic’ all at once.⁴⁵ Heaney’s assessment is more judgemental; Duck’s reaction against georgic optimism ‘makes refreshing reading’, he argues, but he then goes on to acknowledge Duck’s ultimate failure to entirely shrug off the platitudes of ‘conventional diction’.⁴⁶

According to Heaney, ‘it was the unique achievement of Clare to make vocal the regional and particular, to achieve a buoyant and authentic lyric utterance at the meeting-point between social realism and conventional romanticism.’⁴⁷ Clare may have outlived the popularity of georgic poetry in English, but critics have increasingly acknowledged how much of his work is in fact indebted to his georgic predecessors. Citing Timothy Brownlow, Douglas Chambers emphasises the importance of the tradition on Clare’s work and how his pastoral is one which is expressed in georgic terms; what Clare means by pastoral, he proposes, ‘is a poetry of moral landscape – one in which the details of natural history and topography are part of a celebration of the productive rural life’.⁴⁸

Heinzelman has shown how ‘the georgic both did and did not vanish in the Romantic period, depending on which sense of “georgic” one means’. It is a theory corroborated by Goodman, who claims that the georgic exerts ‘a rhizomatic underpresence across a variety of affiliated descriptive and didactic verse genres’.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁴ Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 48.

⁴⁵ Keegan, p. 547. See also Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry*, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁶ Heaney, ‘In the Country of Convention’, pp. 179-180.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁸ See in particular *The Shepherd’s Calendar* (1827). Douglas Chambers, “‘A love for every simple weed’: Clare, botany and the poetic language of lost Eden”, in *John Clare in Context*, ed. by Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips, and Geoffrey Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 238-58 (pp. 244-45): see also Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), p. 94. For a recent overview of the presence of georgic tropes in Clare’s poetry and related criticism, see Gary Harrison, ‘John Clare’s Agrarian Idyll: A Confluence of Pastoral and Georgic’, in *A History British Working-Class Literature*, ed. by John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 195-207.

⁴⁹ Heinzelman, p. 200; Goodman, p. 2. See Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). Heaney’s sense of poetic tradition is usually genealogical not rhizomatic. However, this has not prevented

Heaney, it is via the humble rhizome, the potato, that the georgic in the antipastoral is brought to the surface. If Kavanagh's poems are a testament to the ways in which the pastoral developed into a distinct mode in Ireland – and even more so in Northern Ireland – then Heaney's poetry is evidence of the ways in which the 'matter of Ireland', its specific history and agriculture, gives rise to variations in the georgic. According to Collins, elements in a poem such as 'Follower' from *Death of a Naturalist* can be identified as georgic.⁵⁰ Significantly, Bradley makes the same connection, though not 'in any way to suggest influence, only analogues.'⁵¹ Bradley's notion of 'analogues', though limiting, is a fruitful one in this context because it complicates the poet's own requirements for writing in classical modes, with the georgic reaching him via an undercurrent in the pastoral and antipastoral traditions.

In 'Eclogues in Extremis', where Heaney makes his later claim on pastoral awareness, he goes on to quote an extract from MacNeice's 'An Eclogue for Christmas', in which a country dweller says to an urban dweller: 'Analogue of me, you are wrong to turn to me, | My country will not yield you any sanctuary'.⁵² At the heart of what MacNeice is saying is that the very conventions upon which his poem is based are 'wrong', and in this sense the lines constitute an antipastoral undermining of those very conventions. In Heaney, as in MacNeice, the countryside is shown to be analogous with urban life, but in a sense of proportion – from the Greek *ἀνάλογος* (análogos) 'according to due ratio, proportionate' (*OED*). As previously mentioned in the introduction, Richard.

Andrew J. Auge, in a recent essay, from making the claim that Deleuze and Guattari's theories of the rhizome can be usefully applied to Heaney's work. For Auge, Heaney's 'aspiration toward an arborescent state of organic connectedness is repeatedly frustrated by disruptive encounters with the rhizomatic', highlighting the poet's 'recognition in "At a Potato Digging" that the deracinating rhizome (in this case the fungal potato blight) that has thwarted the possibility of maintaining an arborescent continuity with the past arises from within the roots themselves': see Andre J. Auge, "'A Boyant Migrant Line": Seamus Heaney's Deterritorialized Poetics', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 14 (2003), 269-88 (pp. 272-73). For Rankin Russell, writing in response to Auge, Heaney 'moves easily between the "arborescent" and the "rhizomatic" and actually obtains a certain groundedness from the profusion of variety of lore, myth, and religion attached to his local landscape': see Russell, *Seamus Heaney's Regions*, p. 422-23, n. 30.

⁵⁰ Collins, p. 39. I return to the question of 'Follower' as a georgic poem below.

⁵¹ Bradley, p. 90.

⁵² Heaney, 'Eclogues "In Extremis"', p. 10; MacNeice, *Collected Poems*, ed. by McDonald, pp. 3-7 (p. 3).

F. Thomas identifies Heaney as the inheritor of a genealogy of poets stretching from Virgil to Clare to Kavanagh who engage in a ‘*Georgics* of resistance’ – a form of anti-imperial, agricultural realism equivalent to the antipastoral, but which is able to accurately document the strife of colonial realities in the countryside without having to rely on pastoral hierarchies.⁵³ Thomas references the much-anthologised poem ‘Digging’ as well as ‘At a Potato Digging’ as examples of the form in Heaney, and indeed the frame of reference in ‘At a Potato Digging’ correlates with Thomas’s characterisation: descriptions of potatoes as ‘live skulls, blind eyed’ soon become ‘Live skulls, blind-eyed, balanced on | wild higgledy skeletons’, as the distorted forms of famine are brought into focus.⁵⁴ The biblical clay of Kavanagh’s ‘The Great Hunger’ in Heaney’s poem becomes ‘the black hutch of clay | where the halved seed shot and clotted’, in which the new potato ‘putrefied’, with Heaney adding that ‘Millions rotted along with it.’⁵⁵ As Woodham-Smith makes clear in *The Great Hunger*, the existence of the Irish people at the time of the famine ‘depended on the potato entirely and exclusively’, explaining how, ‘provided it did not fail, [the potato] enabled great quantities of food to be produced at a trifling cost from a small plot of ground’; it was, she states, ‘the most universally useful of foods [...] Yet it was the most dangerous of crops’.⁵⁶ ‘At a Potato Digging’ expresses this very paradox, resisting the mismanagement of the Irish countryside under British colonial rule at the same as it comes to terms with the buried traumas of Ireland’s past by way of the notion of good husbandry.

In *John Clare in Context* (1994), Heaney contributes what the editors identify as a postcolonial perspective on Clare, arguing that ‘it makes sense to think of Clare in relation to the arrival of poetry in that longed-for place or state [...] where not just Homer

⁵³ Thomas, ‘The *Georgics* of Resistance’, pp. 131, 133-34, 143-46.

⁵⁴ Heaney, ‘At a Potato Digging’, p. 20-21. See Thomas, ‘The *Georgics* of Resistance’, p. 140.

⁵⁵ Heaney, ‘At a Potato Digging’, p. 20-21.

⁵⁶ Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-49* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 35. For a readable account of the Great Irish Famine and its contexts that builds on the work of Woodham-Smith, see John Reader, *The Untold History of the Potato* (London: Vintage: 2009), pp. 133-96.

but Hesiod will have his due honour'.⁵⁷ For Heaney, Clare's poetry testifies both to the harsh reality and the necessity of labour, and acknowledges the persistence of the 'age of iron' myth established by Hesiod in his *Works and Days*, the ancient Greek text that is one of the foundations of the georgic. Heaney may have made this statement long after he published *Death of a Naturalist*, but, as has already been suggested, it makes sense to think of Heaney in relation to the georgic as well as pastoral traditions. The question, however, remains: if the georgic is analogous to certain aspects in Heaney, what exactly is it analogous to? The aim of the remainder of this chapter is the identification of such characteristics and their significance.

Heaney's Book of Hours

In his second collection, *Door into the Dark*, Heaney elaborates on the connections between farming and writing established in his first volume. In 'Undine', a love of the land is figured as erotic desire, and husbandry in terms of a sexual union between labourer (male) and landscape (female):

He slashed the briars, shovelled up grey silt
To give me right of way in my own drains
And I ran quick for him, cleared out my rust.

He halted, saw me finally disrobed,
Running clear, with apparent unconcern.
Then he walked by me. I rippled and churned

Where ditches intersect near the river
Until he dug a spade deep in my flank
And took me to him. I swallowed his trench⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'John Clare – a bi-centenary lecture', in *John Clare in Context*, ed. by Haughton, Phillips, and Summerfield, pp. 130-147 (p. 146), repr. as 'John Clare's Prog', in Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*, pp. 63-82.

⁵⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Undine', *Door into the Dark* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 14.

In classical culture, an undine is an elemental mythical being or water-sprite – a female creature who can only gain a soul by marrying a mortal man. Heaney’s ‘Undine’ recalls the transformations and erotic encounters with supernatural beings in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. In the poem, he brings these classical allusions home, channelling high culture through the voice of a humble ditch. He also taps into Gaelic traditions, specifically that of *aisling* poetry (see the introduction), in which Ireland is personified as female. Here, the encounter between poet and muse is depicted on a smaller scale in the farmer’s harnessing of a drain. In his sonnet ‘Epic’, Kavanagh downsizes the conventions of epic poetry, conflating Homer’s *Iliad* with a local row ‘in Ballyrush and Gortin’.⁵⁹ What Kavanagh did for Homer, Heaney does for Ovid; his poem may be one line too long for a sonnet, but its lyrical sleekness still manages to bring what is rather a grand metaphor down to the level of the rural. Indeed, Heaney is as willing as Kavanagh to embrace the association, whether classical, Irish, or English, and is equally inclined to identify with his own home ground.⁶⁰ In a poem such as ‘Undine’, as in the final poem of *Death of a Naturalist*, ‘Personal Helicon’, the land is cultivated in a literary sense through the opening up of the ‘raggle-taggle’ to classical myth and refinement.⁶¹

In ‘Personal Helicon’, Heaney’s speaker comes to admit that ‘To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring | Is beneath all adult dignity’, and ‘Undine’ harbours a similar warning, for it is said that if the mortal breaks his vow with an undine he is doomed to die.⁶² ‘The lough will claim a victim every year,’ writes Heaney in the first poem of ‘A Lough Neagh Sequence’, also from *Door into the Dark* – a reminder that the poet’s

⁵⁹ Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Epic’, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Quinn, p. 184.

⁶⁰ Heaney writes in his 1985 lecture on Kavanagh that ‘Epic’ is ‘a poem more in praise of Kavanagh’s idea of Homer than in praise of Kavanagh’s home’: see Heaney, ‘The Placeless Heaven’, p. 6. John McAuliffe observes that the ‘template for Heaney’s *style* is also laid out in “Epic”’. That is, Kavanagh uses the sonnet to stitch together question and answer, local speech and dictionary learning in a way that we now see as characteristic of Heaney’s work’: see John McAuliffe, “‘Epic’”, Patrick Kavanagh’, *Irish University Review*, 39.2, Poems that Matter 1950-2000 (Autumn/Winter 2009), 195-201 (p. 197).

⁶¹ See Heaney, ‘Personal Helicon’, *Death of a Naturalist*, p. 46.

⁶² *Ibid.*

predisposition to find comfort in the alignment of the classical and the literary with the agricultural does not rule out the antipastoral realism of the poems in *Death of a Naturalist*. Heaney may have replaced the spade with the pen in his *ars poetica* ‘Digging’, but crucially the metaphor remains one of manual labour: ‘I’ll dig with it.’⁶³

‘To beat real iron out’ is the blacksmith’s *raison d’être* in the poem ‘The Forge’, with the stressed beat on the first syllable of ‘real’ hammering home the authenticity and rightness of traditional crafts. Heaney’s insistence on the ‘real’ also hints at the way that as a poet he cannot match it. Once again, in ‘Thatcher’, his touchstone is Ovid:

Couchant for days on sods above the rafters,
He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together
Into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,
And left them gaping at his Midas touch.⁶⁴

The hard work of Heaney in lines such as these is to preserve the practices of the rural community, employing his own artistry as a wordsmith in order to stitch together a series of vignettes, and in the process ‘pinning down his world’ for readers to gape at.⁶⁵ The forms of Heaney’s early poems often express their content: ‘plain and carefully locked as a dry stone wall’ is the way he describes the arrangement of George Mackay Brown’s *An Orkney Tapestry* in 1969. The phrase could just as easily be applied to his own work, such as in the burnished and evenly stitched rhyming lines of ‘Thatcher’.⁶⁶ Yet there is also an unsettling aspect to Heaney’s representation of the rural in his second collection, manifested in the anxiety that his touch might also be that of Midas, casting his figures in nostalgic words of gold, not iron, thus rendering them *unreal*.

If Heaney negotiates a relationship with tradition when it comes to the agricultural in his early work, he inevitably also positions himself in terms of the political landscape.

⁶³ Heaney, ‘Digging’, *Death of a Naturalist*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Seamus Heaney, ‘Thatcher’, *Door into the Dark*, p. 8.

⁶⁵ Heaney, ‘Thatcher’, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Seamus Heaney, ‘Celtic Fringe, Viking Fringe’, a review of George Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry* (1969) and *Conor Cruise O’Brian Introduces Ireland*, ed. by Owen Dudley Edwards (1969), *Listener*, 2108 (21 August 1969), 254-55 (p. 254).

While many of the early poems come across as intensely personal (as in the patriarchal genealogies traced in ‘Digging’, for instance), there is also increasing evidence that Heaney’s rural sensibility is one that has the capacity to engage with the public sphere. Helen Vendler has highlighted the unsung quality of many of the figures in Heaney’s early verse, pointing out how, because they often remain anonymous, ‘his poetic voice will also be anonymous: he will speak both about and for those whose names are lost to history.’⁶⁷ She also acknowledges the way in which Heaney’s poems quickly turn ‘from anonymity to historic specificity’ in the context of political unrest in Northern Ireland.⁶⁸ However, though Heaney’s pronouns change to accommodate contemporary concerns, a focus on the rural remains at the centre of his consciousness as well as his conscience.

In ‘Bogland’, the final poem of *Door into the Dark*, Heaney demonstrates a shift in perspective from the personal to the political by delving deeper into the implications of his Irish home soil. The poem bears a dedication to the artist T. P. Flanagan and was written as a response to a painting Flanagan dedicated to Heaney, itself entitled ‘Boglands’. Flanagan’s abstract landscape appears to be mostly subterranean, with only a small margin of the landscape appearing above the horizon, a perspective that Heaney recreates in his own version:

We have no prairies
To slice a big sun at evening—
Everywhere the eye concedes to
Encroaching horizon,

Is wooed into the cyclops’ eye
Of a tarn. Our unfenced country
Is bog that keep crusting
Between the sights of the sun.⁶⁹

Speaking of the switch in point of view from ‘I’ to ‘we’ in his early work, Heaney explains how ‘Bogland’ was quite obviously written from the vantage point of ‘a

⁶⁷ Vendler, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Seamus Heaney, ‘Bogland’, *Door into the Dark*, pp. 41-42 (p. 41).

Northern Irish Catholic with a nationalist background' and that there is 'an implied alternative to the British connection in making the Bog of Allen the mythic centre'.⁷⁰ For Heaney, focusing his attention on the preservative peat of Ireland entails the use of a first person plural point of view, in that the bog both geographically and symbolically offers an alternative point of identification. As Heaney says of the poem, 'it may have said "we" but it was still all me.'⁷¹

It has been observed that in 'Bogland' Heaney is also responding to the American myths of the pioneers, espoused by poets such as Walt Whitman and, in particular, Theodore Roethke in his poem 'In Praise of Prairie'.⁷² According to Allen, in 'Bogland' 'Heaney seems to be conveying Kavanagh's inward and "parochial" aesthetic to a potential American audience in frontier terms.'⁷³ The fact that Heaney's own 'bogholes might be Atlantic seepage' does indeed suggest he is seeking to make connections with alternative Anglophone traditions other than those associated with Britain.⁷⁴ Heaney's 'pioneers', however, 'keep striking | Inwards and downwards' and, despite the opening up of his poetry to American sources of influence, the poem is as much about the inward-looking nature of Irish poetry as it is about alternative perspectives. Heaney is clearly conscious in the poem, for instance, that the term 'horizon' is etymologically speaking closer to 'boundary' than it is to 'frontier' (*OED*).

In 'The Seed Cutters', one of two poems written in dedication to the poet's mother that commence Heaney's fourth collection *North*, Heaney recreates the point of view of

⁷⁰ Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, pp. 89-90.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷² Michael Allen, 'The Parish and the Dream: Heaney and America', *Southern Review*, 31.3 (Summer 1995), 726-38 (pp. 728-29); Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 19; Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, 'Seamus Heaney and the Americans', *Symbiosis*, 16.1 (2012), 3-20 (p. 4).

⁷³ Allen, 'The Parish and the Dream', p. 728. In an essay entitled 'The Parish and the Universe', Kavanagh argued that 'parochialism' is defined by the 'social and artistic validity of [the] parish', as opposed to what he defined as the metropolitan concept of 'provincialism', see Patrick Kavanagh, 'The Parish and the Universe', in *Collected Prose* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), pp. 281-82 (p. 282). In his review of Barrell and Bull, Heaney himself suggests that Kavanagh's may be a 'frontier' pastoral (p. 180).

⁷⁴ Heaney, 'Bogland', p. 42.

‘At a Potato Digging’, with the figures depicted representing both familiar and anonymous past and present agricultural labourers. Here is the poem in full:

They seem hundreds of years away. Brueghel,
You’ll know them if I can get them true.
They kneel under the hedge in a half-circle
Behind a windbreak wind is breaking through.
They are the seed cutters. The tuck and frill
Of leaf-sprout is on the seed potatoes
Buried under that straw. With time to kill,
They are taking their time. Each sharp knife goes
Lazily halving each root that falls apart
In the palm of the hand: a milky gleam,
And, at the centre, a dark watermark.
Oh, calendar customs! Under the broom
Yellowing over them, compose the frieze
With all of us there, our anonymities.⁷⁵

Heaney has elsewhere acknowledged his identification with the work of the artist Pieter Breughel the Elder, speaking of how he has ‘always felt at home with his scenes – the hayfield, the peasant wedding, the hunters in the snow, children’s games. Things looming large and at the same time being pinned down in the smallest detail’.⁷⁶ In ‘The Seed Cutters’, the labourers are presented at such a distance that they ‘seem hundreds of years away’ but Heaney is also careful to document the details of their labour, describing how each seed potato ‘falls apart | In the palm of the hand: a milky gleam, | And, at the centre, a dark watermark’.⁷⁷ As in *Death of a Naturalist*, potatoes are objects with ambiguous associations: as seeds they promise future growth but the ‘dark watermark’ at their centre serves as a reminder of the blight which so devastatingly rotted the crop in the previous century.

In his review of Fallon’s 2002 translation of the *Georgics*, Heaney describes how at times Virgil’s poem ‘reminds you of the realism of Breughel, at times of the exquisite landscapes of *Les Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*’.⁷⁸ In ‘The Seed Cutters’, written

⁷⁵ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Seed Cutters’, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. xi.

⁷⁶ Heaney, cited in O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 174.

⁷⁷ Heaney, ‘The Seed Cutters’, p. 95. Seed potatoes were typically cut before planting for a larger yield.

⁷⁸ Heaney, ‘Glory Be to the World’, p. 10.

decades before Heaney makes this observation, he composes a sonnet that is both a realistic portrayal of agricultural life and at the same time a symbolic tapestry of immemorial ‘calendar customs’ – hence the ‘half-circle’ arrangement of the labourers in the poem, which is reminiscent of the hemispheres that frame the calendar images of the *Très Riches Heures* illuminated manuscript (Figure 3.1). In this sense, Heaney’s early



Figure 3.1. The Limbourg Brothers, *March*, c. 1412-1416, illumination on vellum, 22.5 cm x 13.6 cm, Musée Condé. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

‘anonymous’ poems constitute his own attempt at an Irish ‘Book of Hours’ for modern times – one that memorialises and immortalises the histories, the habits, and the rituals of the rural community. The phrase ‘our anonymities’ might be a contradiction in terms, but it captures the way in which Heaney continues to identify himself with the landscape’s background figures. Up to this point, poems such as ‘The Seed Cutters’ have themselves remained anonymous in terms of categorisation. They can therefore be read as examples of Heaney’s early, indirect engagement with a georgic tradition, and when gathered together resemble, as the poet writes in ‘A Backward Look’ in *Wintering Out*, the ‘gleanings and leavings | in the combs | of a fieldworker’s archive’.⁷⁹

Heaney’s perspective is typically a backwards one, but to call it nostalgic or escapist would be a mistake. On the contrary, by unearthing historical subject matter he comes to address the violence of the present. The manoeuvre is one that is enacted by Auden in his poem ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’ (1938), written in the build-up to the Second World War and which Heaney emulates in ‘The Seed Cutters’:

In Brueghel’s *Icarus*, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure;⁸⁰

Auden may appear to be shying away from disaster in these lines, but in reality the opposite is true. As Alexander Nemerov elucidates in an article on the figure of the ploughman in Brueghel and Auden, though the ploughman can be identified with the ‘apolitical’ modern intellectual, he is not as ‘oblivious’ as he seems: ‘everything connected with Icarus reappears in the plowman’s space’ (Figure 3.2).⁸¹ For Nemerov, ‘under the poem’s pressure *The Fall of Icarus* becomes a commentary about events in the months leading up to inevitable world conflict.’⁸² Such a backward look, which takes into

⁷⁹ Seamus Heaney, ‘A Backward Look’, *Wintering Out*, pp. 29-30 (p. 30).

⁸⁰ W. H. Auden, ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Mendelson, p. 179.

⁸¹ Alexander Nemerov, ‘The Flight of Form: Auden, Brueghel, and the Turn to Abstraction in the 1940s’, *Critical Inquiry*, 31.4 (Summer 2005) 780-810 (pp. 798-99).

⁸² Nemerov, p. 780.

account the troubled present, can be attributed to Heaney's poem. 'The Seed Cutters', along with another piece dedicated to the poet's mother, 'Sunlight', sits outside the constituent two parts that make up the body of *North*. Presented in this way, it appears a world apart from the poems addressing sectarian violence in that volume (to which I return below). In actual fact, its placement there is the equivalent to the image of a labourer in 'some untidy spot' in a Brueghel painting, in that it reminds the reader at the outset of the collection that 'suffering' takes place in the context of 'calendar customs', and that even the most mundane of tasks take place in the same world as those of larger scale events.⁸³



Figure 3.2. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, c. 1555, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 73.5 cm x 112 cm, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

⁸³ In a 1987 essay on Auden, Heaney responds to Auden's statement that the 'ulterior purpose' of poetry 'is, by telling the truth, to disenchant and disintoxicate', with the proposition: 'poetry functions to produce a sensation of at-homeness and trust in the world'; Seamus Heaney, 'Sounding Auden', in *The Government of the Tongue*, pp. 109-28 (p. 122).

‘A paradigm of earth’

It is through the figure of the ploughman that Heaney’s early agricultural poetry addresses war. We have seen that Heaney arrives at the georgic through his reworking of the pastoral and via the opening up of his conception of the rural to outside influences; another route is via his engagement with epic. As Potts has already observed, there is one particular passage from the *Georgics*, at the end of Book I, that underscores the poem’s appeal to Irish writers such as Heaney:

Surely the time will come when a farmer on those frontiers
Forcing through the earth his curved plough
Shall find old spears eaten away with flaky rust,
Or hit upon helmets as he wields the weight of his mattock
And marvel at the heroic bones he has disinterred

[...]

For Right and Wrong are confused here, there’s so much war in the world,
Evil has so many faces, the plough so little
Honour, the labourers are taken, the fields untended,
And the curving sickle beaten into the sword that yields not.⁸⁴

Mediating the *Eclogues* and *Aeneid* in Virgil’s works, the *Georgics* anticipates epic. It does so by looking forward to a day in which a farmer will incidentally unearth the remnants of past conflicts. Similar scenes of foreshadowing proliferate throughout Heaney’s early work and find their fullest expression in his fifth collection, *Field Work*. In literary terms, Heaney can therefore be associated with the figure of Virgil’s farmer: accidentally or otherwise, by invoking the plough himself, he too comes to unearth the motif of the epic buried in the georgic.

From the early poem ‘Follower,’ in which the child walks in the wake of his father’s plough, Heaney is shown to be conscious of a long tradition of ploughing with the pen:

⁸⁴ Potts, p. 11; *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by C. Day Lewis, l. 493-97, 505-08, p. 31.

An expert. He would set the wing
And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.
The sod rolled over without breaking.
At the headrig, with a single pluck

Of reins, the sweating team turned round
And back to the land. His eye
Narrowed and angled at the ground,
Mapping the furrow exactly.⁸⁵

What was once the matter the child stumbled over is now the poet's subject matter. As in Heaney's other poems about rural skills and crafts, there is an analogy to be drawn here between the ploughman's mapping of the furrow and Heaney's careful calibration of each line. His plodding abab rhyming stanzas reflect the turning of the plough and team at the end of each furrow, and in so doing they reemphasise the etymology of 'verse', derived from the Latin 'versus', 'a line or row', specifically 'a line of writing (so named from turning to begin another line)' – an image which itself is taken from 'vertere', which means 'to turn', as in at the end of a field (*OED*). The credit for the pun, however, can be attributed not to Heaney but to Virgil, as in the *Georgics* (above).

If Heaney is not directly following in Virgil's footsteps in 'Follower', then he is certainly tapping into a lineage of writers in English who themselves are aware of the origins of verse writing. Gerard Manley Hopkins had a profound influence upon Heaney when he was learning his craft, and the physical prowess and 'grey eye's heed steered well' of Hopkins's 'Harry Ploughman' is alluded to in the strength and concentration of the father-figure in Heaney's poem.⁸⁶ A. E. Housman's poem 'Is My Team Ploughing' features a dialogue with a dead ploughman ('No change though you lie under | The land

⁸⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'Follower,' *Death of a Naturalist*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ See Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Harry Ploughman', *Selected Poetry*, ed. by Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 159. In an interview with O'Driscoll, Heaney states that Hopkins was 'the main man' when it came to those who influenced him as a young poet (Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, pp. 38). Furthermore, in his 1974 Chatterton Lecture on Hopkins, delivered at the British Academy, Heaney argued that his sense of 'the artistic act in Hopkins [was] a masculine forging', remarking that Hopkins's 'idea of the Creator himself as father and fondler is central to the mastering, design-making rhetoric and fondling of detail in his work': see Seamus Heaney, "'The Fire I' the Flint": Reflections on the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins', *Preoccupations*, pp. 79-97 (p. 97).

you used to plough’), while in Thomas Hardy’s ‘In Time of “The Breaking of Nations”’, the crumbling of the world order is reflected in the image of ‘a man harrowing clods | In a slow silent walk | With an old horse that stumbles and nods | Half asleep as they stalk’.⁸⁷ Both poets are key figures in Heaney’s constellation, which might well take the form of the plough. Edward Thomas’s wartime poem ‘As the team’s head brass’ is another in which the poet and ploughman meet at the end of each line, physically as well as linguistically in this instance.⁸⁸

Kavanagh’s ‘Ploughman’, who finds ‘a star-lovely art | In a dark sod’, is undoubtedly also a factor in ‘Follower’, but even more important is the influence of the poet whom Heaney would later identify as Virgil’s georgic inheritor: Ted Hughes.⁸⁹ The opening line of the first poem of Hughes’s *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) is ‘I drown in the drumming ploughland’, and in ‘Follower’ Heaney may well be channelling the sequence of war poems that come at the end of that volume.⁹⁰ Hughes’s ‘The Casualty’ features ‘Farmers in the fields’ interrupted in their work by the crash of an aircraft pilot who has come down ‘in a bramble ditch’; the following poem, ‘Bayonet Charge’, tracks a soldier over no-man’s land ‘Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge | That dazzled with rifle fire’, with the battlefield described in terms of ‘shot-slashed furrows’; and in ‘The Ancient Heroes and the Bomber Pilot’, Hughes draws upon Virgil at the end

⁸⁷ A. E. Housman, “‘Is my team ploughing?’”, *The Poems of A. E. Housman*, ed. by Archie Burnett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 28; Thomas Hardy, ‘In Time of “The Breaking of Nations”’, *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by P. N. Furbank (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 65. Emig Rainer traces a genealogy of twentieth-century poets preoccupied with the excavation of the soil from Housman, through T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Geoffrey Hill, to Heaney in ‘Lust in the Ground: The Erotics and Politics of the Soil in Contemporary Poetry’, *Critical Survey*, 14.2 (May 1 2002), 13-50. For more on Hardy’s impact on Heaney, see Ronald Schuchard, “‘Into the Heartland of the Ordinary’: Seamus Heaney, Thomas Hardy, and the Divided Traditions of Modern and Contemporary Poetry”, *Éire-Ireland*, 49.3-4 (Fall/Winter 2014), 270-300.

⁸⁸ The excavation of the origin of ‘verse’ in *vertere* in Thomas’s ‘As the team’s head brass’ has been identified in the following commentaries on that work: Clive Wilmer, ‘Edward Thomas: Englishness and Modernity’, *PN Review*, 27.4 (March-April 2001), 59-64 (p. 64); Edna Longley, *Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2008), p. 301; and Peter Howarth, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 105. I will return to the impact of this particular poem on Heaney’s version of the georgic in chapter V.

⁸⁹ Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Ploughman’, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Quinn, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Hughes, *Collected Poems*, pp. 19.

of Book I of the *Georgics*: ‘When archaeologists dig their remainder out – | Bits of bone, rust – | The grandeur of their wars humbles my thought.’⁹¹

In ‘Requiem for the Croppies’, in *Door into the Dark*, Heaney harvests a symbolic crop that was sown on a past battlefield:

Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon.
The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave.
They buried us without shroud or coffin
And in August the barley grew up out of the grave.⁹²

The poem commemorates the men of the 1792 Irish Rebellion, with the term ‘croppies’ referring to the ‘cropped’ haircuts of the anti-establishment rebels. In Heaney’s hands, it is an opportunity for another pun, this time on the seeds of barley that were carried in the coats of the United Irishmen for sustenance (‘No kitchens on the run, no striking camp’, the speaker explains).⁹³ The pronoun is ‘I’ in this poem, but it is another in which Heaney identifies himself as part of a ‘we’: Northern Irish Catholics. His aim had been to ‘make space in the official Ulster lexicon for Vinegar Hill [the site of the defeat of the rebel forces] as well as the Boyne and the Somme’, but with the increase in civil unrest in the early 1970s in Northern Ireland, giving rise to the violence of Bloody Friday and Bloody Sunday, the poem became – despite the poet’s intentions – a recruiting poem for the IRA. Heaney subsequently ceased to read it in public so as not to be understood as endorsing their campaign.⁹⁴ From *Door into the Dark* onwards, and throughout the 1970s, Heaney’s agricultural metaphors had to be able to bear political scrutiny in troubled times. This did not prevent them being mistaken for rallying cries for a particular cause, thus suffering the same fate as Virgil’s georgic excavations (see Introduction).

⁹¹ Hughes, *Collected Poems*, pp. 42-43, 43-44, 45-46, 47-48.

⁹² Seamus Heaney, ‘Requiem for the Croppies’, *Door into the Dark*, p. 12.

⁹³ Heaney, ‘Requiem for the Croppies’, p. 12.

⁹⁴ See Heaney, cited in O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, pp. 118-19.

A few pages on from ‘Requiem’, in a poem entitled ‘The Wife’s Tale’, Heaney again employs the first-person pronoun (this time speaking for a farmer’s wife) in order to highlight the martial potential of a harvest:

I ran my hand in the hard-filled bags
 Hooked to the slots. It was hard as shot,
 Innumerable and cool. The bags gaped
 Where the chutes ran back to the stilled drum
 And forks were stuck at angles in the ground
 As javelins might mark lost battlefields.
 I moved between them back across the stubble.⁹⁵

In the Latin of Virgil’s *Georgics*, as Richard F. Thomas points out, the word for ‘ear of corn’ is *spiculum*, which is related to javelin (*spicum*), and, according to Thomas, it seems certain that Virgil intended a military image.⁹⁶ The same is true in ‘The Wife’s Tale’, though in this case Heaney is not quite as subtle when it comes to the stubble: the bagged corn is ‘hard as shot’, and forks that are now javelins stand in for ears of corn.⁹⁷ For Heaney – as for Virgil – the worker’s field and the warzone are equivalents: in ‘Whinlands,’ also from *Door into the Dark*, he writes about how burnt gorse (‘whin’) can survive ‘incineration’, how it ‘Persists on hills, near stone ditches, | Over flintbed and battlefield’.⁹⁸

Much has been made of the ‘emblematic function’ (Edna Longley’s term) of the bog figures inspired by P. V. Glob’s *The Bog People* in Heaney’s poems of *Wintering Out* and *North* with respect to the sectarian violence of the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’.⁹⁹ In the series of ‘bog poems’ that stretch from *Door into the Dark* (‘Bogland’) through those two volumes (‘Bog Oak’, ‘The Tollund Man’, ‘Bog Queen’, ‘The Grauballe Man’,

⁹⁵ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Wife’s Tale’, *Door into the Dark*, p. 15-16 (p. 15).

⁹⁶ Virgil, *Georgics*, ed. by Thomas, p. 121.

⁹⁷ Neil Corcoran offers the following critique of the poem, raising the suggestion that the poem’s gender dynamics undermine its authenticity: ‘For all that the men are “grateful” in the poem’s Breughel-like [sic] closing line, there is something too authoritatively directing in the husband, and too humbly subservient in her, for the monologue to ring true as her account of the relationship’: see Corcoran, *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, p. 15.

⁹⁸ Seamus Heaney, ‘Whinlands’, *Door into the Dark*, p. 35.

⁹⁹ Edna Longley, ‘North: “Inner Emigré” or “Artful Voyeur”?’ in *Poetry in the Wars* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 1986), pp. 140-169, reprinted in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. by Tony Curtis, 4th edn (Bridgend: Seren, 2001), pp. 30-63 (p. 44).

‘Punishment’, ‘Strange Fruit’), and which, to differing degrees, address in terms of northern mythology the themes of sectarian violence and civil strife, the ground is less fertile than funereal, a place of ritual. In ‘Punishment’, for instance, the voice is one that comes to ‘understand the exact | and tribal, intimate revenge’ of sacrificial killings.¹⁰⁰ *North* in particular is the collection that has seen the critical reception of Heaney’s poetry at its most animated and divided, with some commentators from Northern Ireland presenting Heaney’s mythmaking around and engagement with the situation there as misguided.¹⁰¹ An overlooked factor in the assessment of these poems, however, is the way in which those processes are analogous to the excavations of the farmer in Virgil’s *Georgics*. Goodman maintains that ‘historical presentness is often “turned up” by georgic as *unpleasurable* feeling: as sensory discomfort, as disturbance in affect and related phenomena’.¹⁰² ‘Unpleasurable feeling’ would be an apt description for the emotions unearthed in Heaney’s bog works, not to mention the poet’s anxieties about how his identification with the minority Catholic community might be interpreted.

The presence of affectively powerful, archaeologically excavated materials – bodies and objects, and often agricultural implements – throughout the two collections entails the stirring of conflicted emotions in the speakers of Heaney’s poems, especially when it comes to the political role of the poet in the context of civil violence. In ‘Belderg’, the bog reveals ‘the first plough-marks’, and in ‘Kinship’ the poet lifts a turf-spade from the earth.¹⁰³ References to earlier poems from *Death of a Naturalist* (‘Digging’ and ‘Follower’) serve to re-emphasise the self-consciousness of Heaney’s

¹⁰⁰ Seamus Heaney, ‘Punishment,’ *North*, pp. 30-31 (p. 31).

¹⁰¹ The most outspoken critics of Heaney came from Belfast: see Ciaran Carson, ‘Escaped from the massacre’, *The Honest Ulsterman* 50 (Winter 1975), pp. 183-86; repr. as ‘*Sweeney Astray*: Escaping from Limbo’, in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. by Curtis, pp. 139-148, and Longley, “‘Inner Emigré’ or “‘Artful Voyeur’?”. For a significant postcolonial critique of Heaney’s poetry, see David Lloyd, “‘Pap for the Dispossessed’: Seamus Heaney and the Politics of Identity”, in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993), 13-40, repr. in *Seamus Heaney*, ed. by Michael Allen, Macmillan Casebook Series (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 155-84.

¹⁰² Goodman, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰³ Seamus Heaney, ‘Belderg’, *North*, pp. 4-5 (p.4); ‘Kinship’, *North*, pp. 33-39 (p. 35).

poetic endeavour when it comes to writing about the land. And yet, they also demonstrate a renewed confidence with regard to his use of agricultural metaphors:

It said, 'Lie down
in the word-hoard, burrow
the coil and gleam
of your furrowed brain.

Compose in darkness.
Expect aurora borealis
in the long foray
but no cascade of light.

Keep your eye clear
as the bleb of the icicle,
trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
your hands have known.'¹⁰⁴

Here, Heaney's muses may be his violent ancestors of Northern Europe, but his archaeological harvest is one that is equally indebted to a georgic inheritance, even if this is more indirect. As Fairer puts it, 'the furrow and the furrowed brow, the harrow and the occasionally harrowing, are all part of the georgic.'¹⁰⁵ Heaney's 'furrowed brain', which becomes more and more furrowed over the course of the decade between *Door into the Dark* and *Field Work*, is a sign of an increasing tension in his poetry as he continually works over the predicament of adequately addressing the political situation in Northern Ireland. It is also the mark of a realisation in his mind that the symbolism of a ploughed field might hold the key to his position as a poet in a divided society, and that he must come to 'trust the feel' of his rural background and the 'nubbed treasure' of its soil if he is to find a place for himself.

In the 'Glanmore Sonnets' of Heaney's fifth collection *Field Work*, the relationship between the line and the furrow finds its pinnacle in Heaney, and it is here, according to Edna Longley, that 'the collection defines itself as Georgic':

¹⁰⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'North', *North*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Fairer, 'Georgic', p. 467.

Now the good life could be to cross a field
And art a paradigm of earth new from the lathe
Of ploughs.¹⁰⁶

Heaney's evocation of the 'good life' in these lines is a reflection of how georgic poetry offers the reader practical and moral instruction by, in the words of Fallon, infusing 'descriptions of a way of life with prescriptions of a way to live'.¹⁰⁷ Such lessons are particularly resonant for Heaney in times of civil conflict, just as they were for Virgil. When Heaney writes in the second of the 'Glanmore Sonnets' how 'Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground, | Each verse returning like the plough turned round,' he is exposing the etymology of verse writing to his own contemporary situation. *Field Work* comes to represent a decisive turn in Heaney's attitude towards the land (and therefore towards the violence in the north), in that it comes to embody a stance that reverses the implement-to-weapon transformation characteristic of his early poems. Instead, Heaney comes to advocate, as Virgil did, an emphasis on the arts of peace.

The Arts of Peace

In 1972, Heaney relocated to Glanmore Cottage in County Wicklow south of the border with the decision to make poetry his sole vocation (he had previously held an academic post at Queens University Belfast). It is significant that the publication of *Preoccupations* (1980), Heaney's first collection of critical prose, loosely coincides with that of *Field Work* and his time spent at Glanmore, for the pun on the title (i.e. before occupation) suggests the ways in which the essays arose out of his experiences before he became a full-time writer. It also indicates that they constitute the making of Heaney the poet. The 'Foreword' provides a rationale for the volume as an attempt to find answers to 'central

¹⁰⁶ Longley, *Poetry and Posterity*, p. 104; Seamus Heaney, 'Glanmore Sonnets: I', *Field Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Fallon, 'Translator's Note', Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Peter Fallon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. xxxiv-xxxvi (p. xxxiv).

preoccupying questions', namely: 'how should a poet properly live and write? What is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?'¹⁰⁸ Significantly, in Heaney's view, writing and life, voice and place, literary tradition and contemporary world, were at this stage in his career mutually inclusive. Quoting from Yeats, Heaney chooses the following extract as the epigraph to *Preoccupations*:

If we understand our own minds, and the things which are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root. Coventry Patmore has said, 'The end of art is peace,' and the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupation it demands.¹⁰⁹

The maxim Heaney inherits from Patmore and Yeats hinges on a paradox: while it states that the *raison d'être* of art is peace, it also suggests, as Neil Corcoran has shown, that an end to war would undermine the purpose of art, the implication being that poets such as Yeats and Heaney primarily write as a response to political violence.¹¹⁰

In the essay 'Yeats as an Example?', also in *Preoccupations*, Heaney quotes the phrase again before providing a lengthy extract from section VI of Yeats's poem 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', which includes the refrain: 'honey-bees, | Come build in the empty house of the stare.'¹¹¹ In his Nobel Prize speech delivered years later, Heaney commented on the way in which the image of the honey bee in Yeats's well-known poem is 'an image deeply lodged in the poetic tradition and always suggestive of the ideal of an industrious, harmonious, nurturing commonwealth.'¹¹² Heaney might well be referring here to the fourth book of the *Georgics*, in which Virgil famously extols the virtues of bees in terms of model Roman citizens:

¹⁰⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Foreword', *Preoccupations*, pp. 13-14 (p. 13).

¹⁰⁹ W. B. Yeats, cited in Heaney, *Preoccupations* [n.pag.].

¹¹⁰ Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, p. 108.

¹¹¹ Seamus Heaney, 'Yeats as an Example?', *Preoccupations*, pp. 98-114 (p. 112).

¹¹² Seamus Heaney, 'Crediting Poetry', *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 445-67 (p. 463).

I'll tell you of a tiny
Republic that makes a show well worth your admiration –
Great-hearted leaders, a whole nation whose work is planned,
Their morals, groups, defences –

[...]

Sweet then is their strange delight
As they cherish their children, their nestlings: then with craftsmanship they
Hammer out the fresh wax and mould the tacky honey.

[...]

They will settle down of their own accord in the place you have perfumed,
And crawl to the innermost room for rest, as their custom is.

But now, suppose they have sallied to battle: for between
Two queens there often arises trouble that comes to war.
At once, from afar, forewarned you will be of the mob's anger,
Their hearts spoiling for a fight.¹¹³

Like Yeats's 'Meditations', Virgil's encouragement of the cultivation of bees was written in a time of war, and so is an appeal – even an apology – for the peacetime activity of husbandry. It might also be read as an apology for poetry, but crucially one that acknowledges the reality of a violent world and the knife-edge on which any civic – or even natural – harmony is balanced. Virgil's call for a restoration of the land in the *Georgics* is therefore not made in denial, but instead provides a reminder of the fact that any community or treaty can turn sour, that morals must be maintained like defences, and that even a culture which tends to its 'nestlings' has the capacity to be governed by the mentality of the 'mob'. Yeats's assertion that 'all life has the same root' conforms to the notion that poetry can maintain autonomy in hard times while also functioning as a form of political radicalism. As a writer inclined to 'pry into roots,' Heaney would be all too aware that the term 'radical' is derived from 'root' and is a linguistic contact point between the political and the organic. Indeed, his preoccupation with Yeats's maxim

¹¹³ *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by C Day Lewis, IV. 3-5, 55-57, 65-70, pp. 77-79.

suggests that he is sensitive to the models of Virgil and Yeats as examples of artistic responses in violent times. It also suggests that he understands how in certain contexts the radically peaceful can be interpreted as the politically radical.

Yeats's maxim appears yet again in the final stanza of Heaney's 'The Harvest Bow', which appears towards the end of *Field Work*. 'The end of art is peace', he writes, 'could be the motto of this frail device', the term 'device' referring at once to the poem itself, the metaphor contained within the poem, and the form of the harvest bow as material object.¹¹⁴ According to Heaney, 'The Harvest Bow' was one of the first poems he wrote after the publication of *North*. As such, it contains the key to the clear change in tone between the two volumes. Fashioned from a successful crop yield, harvest bows take the form of house blessings and are hung to serve as a reminder of thanks for a bounteous harvest. Significantly, it is not in the object itself that Heaney finds meaning but in its making:

As you plaited the harvest bow
You implicated the mellowed silence in you
In wheat that does not rust
But brightens as it tightens twist by twist
Into a knowable corona,
A throwaway love-knot of straw.¹¹⁵

The internal half-rhyme of 'plaited' and 'implicated' verbally enacts the process by which the work of art is made meaningful. Another internal rhyme finds 'wheat' in 'brightens', which immediately then 'tightens', creating a tense muteness that could derive from the sense that something of value is being lost yet preserved as each line is crafted; it also hints at that which remains unspoken in the father/son relationship at the heart of the poem. The way 'rust' is offset by 'twist' exemplifies how the casual intricacy of Heaney's poem echoes that of the harvest bow itself: Heaney's symbolism is both 'throwaway' and as lasting as a 'love-knot', suggesting that the fruits of labour

¹¹⁴ Seamus Heaney, 'The Harvest Bow', *Field Work*, p. 58.

¹¹⁵ Heaney, 'The Harvest Bow', p. 58.

themselves are both forever and short lived. As is so often the case in Heaney's verse, meaning is circular, in this instance a 'knowable corona' of straw.

Blake Morrison has noted how on the one hand the many circles found in *Field Work* 'symbolise domestic and marital perfection' but how on the other hand 'circles can symbolize artistic self-enclosure'.¹¹⁶ For Morrison, the subtext of *Field Work* as a whole is

Heaney's sense of himself as resembling the other famous figures who retreated into the sanctuary of rural life: Horace, in his 'leafy privacy' far from Rome (Ann Saddlemeyer's loan of the Wicklow gate-lodge is like Maecenas' gift of the Sabine farm); Virgil, whose *Georgics* gave instructions in agriculture; Sweeney, of the Irish epic poem, who after the noise of battle was turned into a bird and roamed the countryside.¹¹⁷

North closes with the poem 'Exposure', in which Heaney is already holed up in the Republic in Glanmore, having 'Escaped from the massacre' of political violence in the north.¹¹⁸ He writes of 'weighing and weighing / My responsible *tristia*', a reference to another famous figure in isolation, the exiled Augustan poet Ovid.¹¹⁹ In the earlier poem, Heaney's self-imposed seclusion is a return to what can be described as a pastoral setting of dripping alders, birches, and ash trees. By the time Heaney comes to write 'The Harvest Bow', the emphasis is less on pastoral seclusion than on a landscape that itself does not preclude forms of violence.¹²⁰

In the third and fourth stanzas of 'The Harvest Bow', Heaney expands the circle and begins to reveal the poem's implications beyond the personal and the pastoral:

And if I spy into its golden loops
I see us walk between the railway slopes
Into an evening of long grass and midges,
Blue smoke straight up, old beds and ploughs in hedges,

¹¹⁶ Morrison, p. 80.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

¹¹⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Exposure', *North*, p. 73.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Edna Longley writes that "georgic" might cover war poems set in a rural environment, however war-disrupted; whereas "eclogue" consciously deploys a rural setting to 'meditate' on war. Neither category is watertight.' She then proceeds to read Yeats's 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' as poem which 'mingles civil-war eclogue, war-disrupted georgic, country-house pastoral, observation of Nature, Nature as spiritual nurture': see Edna Longley, *Yeats and Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 135-36.

An auction notice on an outhouse wall –
You with your harvest bow in your lapel,

Me with the fishing rod, already homesick
For the big lift of those evenings, as your stick
Whacking the tips off weeds and bushes
Beats out of time, and beats, but flushes
Nothing: that original townland
Still tongue-tied in the straw tied by your hand.¹²¹

The ‘old beds and ploughs in hedges’ and the ‘auction notice on an outhouse wall’ speak of the depopulation of the countryside. Rural practices, for whatever reason, are being neglected – a sense encouraged by the pre-emptive and alienating quality of the phrase ‘already homesick’. Crucial to the poem’s symbolism is that it contains within it the solace of redress, though not in any conventional sense of the word. In the title essay of his volume of Oxford Lectures, *The Redress of Poetry*, Heaney lands upon an ‘(obsolete) meaning [of ‘redress’] which comes in entry four of the verb, subsection (b): “*Hunting*. To bring back (the hounds or deer) to the proper course”’.¹²² In this definition, Heaney explains, ‘there is no hint of ethical obligation; it is more a matter of finding a course for the breakaway of innate capacity, a course where something unhindered, yet directed, can sweep ahead into its full potential’.¹²³ Stephen James picks up on how, in this instance, Heaney ‘appears blithely impervious to the bloody implications of his chosen analogy: to redress in the sense he summons is to turn the prey, to line up for the kill’.¹²⁴ While Heaney does all he can in this essay to suppress those notions of violence associated with redress, in the poem he opens up a space in which the violent and peaceful appear to coexist.

Appropriately, ‘The Harvest Bow’ is full of references to hunting and poaching methods: it remembers ‘a lifetime of gamecocks’, the speaker is armed with a ‘fishing

¹²¹ Heaney, ‘Harvest Bow’, p. 58.

¹²² Seamus Heaney, ‘Introduction’, *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*, pp. 1-16 (p. 15).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Stephen James, *Shades of Authority: The Poetry of Lowell, Hill and Heaney* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 148.

rod', and even the bow itself is depicted in terms of a 'drawn snare'.¹²⁵ Such references recall an earlier evocation of hunting practices in the poem entitled 'Land' from *Wintering Out*, in which Heaney constructs a harvest bow figure and positions it gazing 'out past | the shifting hares' in homage to the landscape of his childhood, only to find himself 'snared, swinging | an ear-ring of sharp wire'.¹²⁶ In that poem, as in 'The Harvest Bow', Heaney appears to show at least some awareness of the risk of getting caught out by his own imagery. The pun on 'beat' in the latter poem is yet another hunting reference, evoking the practice of flushing cover for game, while also equating this violence with the rhythmical nature of poetry itself. The lines are ambiguous in that it is impossible to tell whether the 'whacking' flushes 'nothing' because there is no wildlife or because the act itself is in fact non-threatening. In other words: are the figures in the poem in harmony with their surroundings, or are they isolated within it after the landscape has been emptied of life, with 'nothing' now remaining of 'that original townland'?

Heaney has elsewhere come under fire for exhibiting a desire in his poetry and his prose to 'run with the hare [...] and hunt with the hounds' in a political sense.¹²⁷ In 'The Harvest Bow', the self-awareness of the poem's nostalgia, coupled with the troubled implications of its artisanal imagery, could be taken as a very different kind of political statement: not so much a call to arms but a call to art. In his lecture on Clare, Heaney returns to the 'obsolete' notion of redress, making the claim that it is in Clare's nature poems of the 1820s and 1830s in particular in which it is possible to detect the meaning of the term in 'the breakout of innate capacity which marks all true lyric activity'.¹²⁸ This he locates in Clare's use of the ballad stanza in 'The Lament of Swordy Well', which, according to Heaney, 'places him at the centre of his world and keeps his voice on course

¹²⁵ Heaney, 'The Harvest Bow', p. 58.

¹²⁶ Heaney, 'Land', *Wintering Out*, pp. 48-49.

¹²⁷ Longley, "'Inner Emigré" or "Artful Voyeur"?", p. 78.

¹²⁸ Heaney, 'John Clare's Prog', p. 69.

like a plough in a furrow'.¹²⁹ This shift in the metaphor, here, from one of hunting to cultivation, is significant. The fact cannot be ignored that in Clare's lament, as Heaney says, 'the assailed dignity of the pauper and the fate of the requisitioned ground are mutually expressive', suggesting that there is more at stake in the activity of lyric poetry, and therefore in Heaney's understanding of redress, than he expressed in his first lecture.

It may be that in *Field Work*, as in the volumes preceding it, Virgil is only, as Florence Impens puts it, a 'holographic figure' – not quite the concrete influence Heaney would directly emulate in later years.¹³⁰ And yet, as this chapter has shown, Heaney's sensibility in many of his early poems corresponds with that of the poet of the *Georgics*, as well as those other poets who have maintained a similar outlook. *Field Work* closes with 'Ugolino', a translation of an episode from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and as Impens has shown, it is the image of Virgil as the guide in Dante's poem that primarily informs Heaney's poetic vision in *Field Work* and beyond, with him finding in Dante's epic another possible way of addressing the conflict in Northern Ireland.¹³¹ The transition from Dantean to classical Virgil, as Impens documents it, plays out over Heaney's three subsequent collections, *Station Island* (1984), *Seeing Things* (1991), and *The Spirit Level* (1996), which sees, she adds, 'Heaney rewrite both the *Inferno* and, for the first time, Book VI of the *Aeneid*'.¹³² Heaney's increasing engagement with Virgil as a direct classical precedent in and beyond these volumes coincides with his return to the rural world of his early poetry and his conflicted – in the many senses of the term – feelings surrounding it. As he writes in a poem in which Philip Larkin stands in for Virgil, it is a 'journey back | Into the heartland of the ordinary', but this time in a more self-conscious

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹³⁰ Impens, 'Virgilian Presences in the Work of Seamus Heaney', p. 253.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 252.

¹³² Ibid., p. 254.

fashion.¹³³ It is Heaney's second, more deliberate turning of Virgil's wheel, therefore, that is the focus of chapter IV.

¹³³ Seamus Heaney, 'The Journey Back', *Seeing Things* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 7.

CHAPTER IV

Seamus Heaney and the Georgic Turn: *District and Circle*

Tools were made, and Born were hands—
Every Farmer Understands.

William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence'¹

In the second section of the poem 'The Loose Box', in the 2001 collection *Electric Light*, Heaney recalls the influences, subject matter, and rhythms of his early work:

On an old recording Patrick Kavanagh states
That there's health and worth in any talk about
The properties of land. Sandy, glarry,
Mossy, heavy, cold, the actual soil
Almost doesn't matter; the main thing is
An inner restitution, a purchase come by
By pacing it in words that make you feel
You've found your feet in what 'surefooted' means
And in the ground of your own understanding –
Like Heracles stepping in and standing under
Atlas's sky-lintel, as earthed and heady
As I am when I talk about the loose box.²

Critics have identified in these lines a progression from Heaney's early to late styles:

O'Donoghue comments on the way the 'trochaic adjectives' used to describe the soil are characteristic of the poet's early poetry, while the experience of Heracles, he argues, is 'much more typical of the tendency in later Heaney to use classical parallels as expressions of intellectual and psychic self-scrutiny'.³ Davis also identifies 'The Loose Box' as a kind of programme piece in *Electric Light*,⁴ adding that Heaney's willingness in the poem to 'let go of the actuality of the thing and to relish the words themselves is

¹ William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence', *Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. by W. H. Stevenson, 3rd edn (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2007), pp. 612-15 (p. 613).

² Seamus Heaney, 'The Loose Box', *Electric Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), pp 14-16 (p. 14).

³ O'Donoghue, p. 108.

indicative of the way his later work has carried out a subtle adjustment in his orientation towards literary tradition and literary language.’⁴

Heaney’s reference to Kavanagh does indeed suggest the poem is a throwback to the forms and themes of *Death of a Naturalist*, where the influence of that poet is at its most pronounced. Yet the self-consciousness of the allusion in ‘The Loose Box’ also suggests a development in Heaney’s relationship with his predecessor. Reading Kavanagh may have given the young poet permission to write about subjects he considered ‘below or beyond books’ but here Heaney finds ‘worth’ instead in ‘*talk*[ing] about / The properties of land,’ to the point that ‘the actual soil / *Almost* doesn’t matter’ (emphasis added).⁵

This framing of influence in ‘The Loose Box’ accentuates the ambiguities that governed Heaney’s poetry from his first collection. Indeed, upon closer reading, it becomes impossible to determine precisely who makes the claim that the ‘actual soil’ is not so important: the passage commences with Kavanagh yet ends with the poet’s own ‘talk’, with the lines in-between taking on an indeterminate quality, raising the following questions: where does the recording of Kavanagh end and Heaney’s talk begin? How much of the passage is quoted and how much is interpretation? Is Heaney in agreement with Kavanagh, or does he in fact distance himself from his predecessor by playing down his own attachment to physical matter? Despite the surefootedness of Heaney’s register, such uncertainties are characteristic of his later poetry more generally, especially when he writes of rural subjects as he does in ‘The Loose Box’ (which in actuality refers to a stable in which animals are kept ‘loose’ without being tied in place).

In his mature poetry, there is still room for manoeuvre in the space between Kavanagh and the classics, with Heaney finding himself both ‘earthed and heady’, still in

⁴ Davis, p. 101.

⁵ Heaney, ‘The Placeless Heaven’, p. 7.

touch with the down-to-earth but in his post-Nobel Prize years all the more embedded within and interested in tradition. Reciprocating the poet's own 'awareness of tradition', O'Donoghue borrows the term 'bucolic' in order to acknowledge the 'insistent' influence of Virgil in *Electric Light*, tracing the tradition back to Theocritus.⁶ Davis also picks up on how 'the real presiding spirit in the volume is not Kavanagh but Virgil'.⁷ As the forms of many of the poems suggest – 'Bann Valley Eclogue', 'Virgil: Eclogue IX', 'Glanmore Eclogue' – Heaney does indeed draw classical parallels with Virgil's *Eclogues* in the collection. *Electric Light* represents his most self-conscious engagement with the literary tradition of pastoral in particular, both in poems explicitly harking back to their classical origins and in direct translations. Yet Heaney's conception of the pastoral was more wide-ranging than even O'Donoghue's generous terminology permits. Heaney uses the examples of Michael Longley, Czesław Miłosz and Miklós Radnóti as writers who have sustained the mode in recent times of conflict. 'Eclogues "In Extremis"', then, might more obviously describe Heaney's own more 'loose' relationship with the pastoral in *Electric Light*. In the first of the 'Sonnets from Hellas,' entitled 'Into Arcadia', Heaney describes a 'goatherd | With his goats in the forecourt of the filling station, | Subsisting beyond eclogue or translation'.⁸ The poem also features a 'farmer' mentioned in the context of Hesiod.⁹ Such comparisons stress a need to go 'beyond eclogue' in the interpretation of Heaney's pastorals if the range of his references and his renewed engagement with his subject matter are to be fully appreciated.

Heaney's assertion in his essay that the pastoral is an inherently self-conscious mode has further implications when it comes to his later work. If Heaney's use of pastoral tropes and forms is more explicitly informed by classical tradition, then how should those elements that are agricultural in a broader sense but not written within the parameters of

⁶ O'Donoghue, pp. 106-07.

⁷ Davis, p. 103.

⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Sonnets from Hellas: I, Into Arcadia', *Electric Light*, p. 38.

⁹ Heaney, 'Into Arcadia', p. 38.

the eclogue be interpreted? By quoting Kavanagh's proposal that 'there's health and worth in any talk about | The properties of land', Heaney is in one sense paving the way for the talk of land rights in his translation of 'Eclogue IX', in which Moeris laments the dispossession of farmland in the wake of civil war, complaining how an 'outsider lands and says he has the rights | To our bit of ground.'¹⁰ The 'main thing' about such 'talk', the speaker of 'The Loose Box' maintains, is the sense of an 'inner restitution' – the act of restoring something to its proper owner, or reparations given – stressing such connotations in the 'purchase come by | By pacing it in words'.¹¹ Yet the intimate and detailed description of soil properties in 'The Loose Box' – 'Sandy, glarry, | Mossy, heavy, cold' – is in fact more in line with the matter of Virgil's *Georgics*, in which the poet instructs the implied landowner on the virtues of good husbandry and charts 'the quality of land in any place — what's best about it, | its tints and textures, its capacity for produce' (II. 177-78).¹² As such, the discussion of land rights in Heaney's translation is another example of the poet's preoccupation with the contested notion of *patria*, and reasserts the notion that there is 'health and worth' in language about the land.

Both O'Donoghue and Davis express a sense of surprise that Heaney reaches for the *Eclogues* over the *Georgics* in *Electric Light*. As Davis puts it:

It was Kavanagh's local, parochial agrarianism that governed Heaney's early poetry, and you would expect, given the evidence of that poetry's obsession with the textures of agricultural work, that when Heaney came to translate Virgil's rural corpus it would be the more practical agricultural instructions of the *Georgics* that would attract his attention. Instead, what Heaney translates in *Electric Light* is a series of stylized passages from the *Eclogues*.¹³

¹⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'Virgil: Eclogue IX', *Electric Light*, pp. 31-34 (p. 31).

¹¹ The 'inner restitution' espoused by Heaney in 'The Loose Box' corresponds to the idea of 'redress' that he explores in his Oxford lectures, especially the first *OED* definition: 'Reparation of, satisfaction or compensation for, a wrong sustained or a loss resulting from this.' Crucial to Heaney's argument in *The Redress of Poetry*, however, is that, while poetry cannot compensate for material loss, it redresses by virtue of it being poetry, possessing its 'own solitude and distinctness' from the political sphere: see Seamus Heaney, 'Introduction', *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*, pp. 1-16 (pp. 15-16).

¹² Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Fallon, p. 33.

¹³ Davis, p. 103: see also O'Donoghue, p. 107.

In light of these comments, the poet's practical and agricultural talk about the soil in 'The Loose Box' suggests the modal aspects of the poems are more unstable than previously acknowledged, and might inform a more flexible critical approach when considering Heaney's engagement with the pastoral tradition. Read in such a context, 'The Loose Box' is not so much a programme piece for *Electric Light* per se as a precursor to Heaney's 2006 collection *District and Circle*, in which his representation of agricultural tasks and tools (as well as his talk of the land) is informed by and large not by the *Eclogues* but the *Georgics*.

Heaney has made explicit the importance of both Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Aeneid* to his work. When asked by O'Driscoll about the prominence of the eclogue as well as other 'loose-weave' forms in *Electric Light*, he comments on the way that a new translation of the *Eclogues* by David Ferry 'captivated [him] entirely' and prompted him to 'writ[e] a couple of [his] own'.¹⁴ A further question from O'Driscoll leads him to add that 'there's one Virgilian journey that has indeed been a constant presence and that is Aeneas's venture into the underworld. The motifs of Book VI have been in my head for years.'¹⁵ No such claim is made for Virgil's *Georgics*. Yet a number of other factors and more subtle statements made by Heaney elsewhere suggest that Virgil's middle work was indeed on his mind when he wrote his penultimate collection. *District and Circle* is preceded by Fallon's translation of the *Georgics* by only two years, and not only did Heaney favourably review the work in *The Irish Times*, but he is also listed by Fallon in the acknowledgements under those who provided 'instructive readings' of the work-in-progress.¹⁶ The pitch of Heaney's review hints at the ways Fallon's *Georgics* spoke to his own sense of a tradition of rural writing: after praising the 'natural vernacular' of the translation, he describes how the original poem belongs 'at one and the same time in

¹⁴ Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 389.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Fallon, 'Afterwords', p. 127.

Arcadia and in the fields at the back of the house, and speaks a language that is equally as flexible, able to shift between the technical, practical idiom of farming and heightened cadenced voice of poetic tradition'.¹⁷ Here, Heaney sounds more and more as if he were describing his own poetry as characterised by the both 'earthed and heady' content of 'The Loose Box', in which a rural 'practical idiom' rubs shoulders with 'heightened' allusions to the classics.

District and Circle does not in fact contain any direct references to or translations of Virgil – though it does contain versions of Horace, Rilke and Cavafy, as well as poems written in memory of writers such as Ted Hughes and Czesław Miłosz, and other literary acknowledgements throughout.¹⁸ As in Heaney's early work, *District and Circle* often reaches the georgic through other twentieth century and contemporary poets. The degree to which Heaney deliberately imitates Virgil's *Georgics* is difficult to determine, yet as his involvement in Fallon's translation undeniably shows, he was certainly aware of the georgic model from 2004 onwards, if not before. Furthermore, Heaney's comparison of Hughes's *Moortown* with Virgil's *Georgics* in 2007 (see the introduction) is proof that the georgic mode was of increasing importance to him in his later years.¹⁹ It is therefore worth reading *District and Circle* with such classical parallels in mind, and to interpret the poems in much the same way that Heaney himself reads Hughes's *Moortown*: as distinct variations on the themes and forms that are present in Virgil's original.

In *Electric Light*, in his modern adaptation of Virgil in 'Glanmore Eclogue', Heaney pays homage to a patron:

Call her Augusta
Because we arrived in August, and from now on
This month's baled hay and blackberries and combines
Will spell Augusta's bounty.²⁰

¹⁷ Heaney, 'Glory Be to the World', p. 10.

¹⁸ *Electric Light* had previously featured a homage to Hughes in 'On His Work in the English Tongue', composed before the poet's death but dedicated to his memory (pp. 61-63).

¹⁹ Heaney, 'Suffering and Decision', p. 225.

²⁰ Heaney, 'Glanmore Eclogue', *Electric Light*, pp. 35-37 (p. 35).

As Impens observes, the poem reinterprets Virgil with allusions to Heaney's relocation to County Wicklow in the 1970s.²¹ Significantly, she writes,

Augusta, Heaney's benefactor, and a fictional figure standing for Ann Saddlemeier whose Glanmore Cottage the Heaneys first rented and then bought is the twenty-first-century equivalent of Augustus, Virgil's patron.²²

When Heaney comes to publish *District and Circle*, he chooses the above quotation from his own poem as the epigraph to the new volume, encouraging a sense of continuity between the two collections – one that echoes the development of rural themes that takes place between Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. The parallels do not end here. In his review of Fallon, Heaney comments on the 'unsentimental, holistic' quality of the *Georgics*, adding that after 'two millennia of technical improvements in agriculture and no improvements whatever in the war mongering activity of the species, [the poem] doesn't sound old'.²³ Heaney's return to familiar ground in *District and Circle* gives rise to a number of poems which are equally 'unsentimental' and 'holistic' in their rural – and at times environmentally conscious – outlook, raising the question of the degree to which they might be self-consciously 'georgic'.

An Age of Iron

District and Circle opens with a poem dedicated to the artist Hughie O'Donoghue, entitled 'The Turnip-Snedder.' In an interview, Heaney explains that 'in a catalogue for an exhibition, [O'Donoghue] included a photograph of this old implement surrounded by a pile of sugar beet'.²⁴ The photograph, reproduced on the cover of the US edition of the collection (Figure 4.1), may have been the direct inspiration behind the subject of the

²¹ The poet, she explains, represents Heaney, an 'outsider' to the world inhabited by Myles, 'the modern counterpart to Moeris': see Impens, 'Virgilian Presences in the Work of Seamus Heaney', p. 258.

²² Ibid.

²³ Heaney, 'Glory Be to the World', p. 10.

²⁴ Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 407.

poem, but another potential influence is also detectable in the martial language employed by Heaney in his description:

In an age of bare hands
and cast iron,

the clamp-on meat-mincer,
the double-flywheeled water-pump,

it dug its heels in among wooden tubs
and troughs of slops,

hotter than body heat
in summertime, cold in winter

as winter's body armour,
a barrel-chested breast-plate

standing guard
on four braced greaves.²⁵

The verb 'sned' means to prune or form by cutting, and there is the impression here that

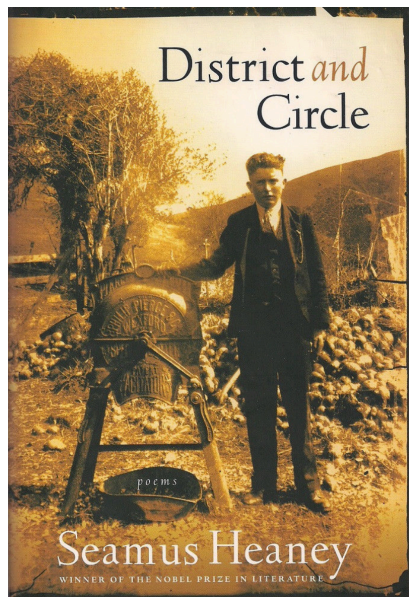


Figure 4.1. 'Unknown Young Man, Ireland', reproduced on the jacket cover of the U.S. edition of Heaney's *District and Circle* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006) courtesy of Hughie O'Donoghue.

Heaney has cut his couplets down to size; each line has only a few spare unstressed syllables, which with the use of alliteration and compounds – 'clamp-on meat-mincer', 'flywheeled water-pump', 'barrel-chested breast-plate' – creates a fortified diction. Heaney's use of militaristic vocabulary transfigures the farming implement into a weapon of war. Of course, the framing of a labouring device as a weapon will not be new to those familiar with Heaney's early poetry. As the speaker recollects a more primitive 'age of [...] iron' the reader is invited to cast their mind back to

²⁵ Seamus Heaney, 'The Turnip-Snedder', *District and Circle* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 3. All further references to poems from *District and Circle* will be taken from this edition; references will occur in parentheses.

‘Digging’, the well-known opening poem of *Death of a Naturalist*, in which the ‘squat pen rests; snug as a gun’.²⁶

Richard F. Thomas argues that the martial undertones of ‘Digging’ are evidence of the influence of Virgil, who in the *Georgics* also draws from ‘the language of warfare and weaponry when writing of the farmer’s task’.²⁷ The introduction to the topic of farming implements (I. 160-61) reads in Fallon’s translation as ‘the tools and tackle unflagging farmers had to have | in their arsenal, for none has sowed or saved a crop without them’.²⁸ This influence can be seen elsewhere in Heaney’s oeuvre, most significantly in the ‘sharpened, balanced, tested, fitted’ poem and hand-tool ‘The Pitchfork’ which is described as a ‘javelin’ in *Seeing Things* – a collection that features for the first time the presence of Virgil as a direct precedent in Heaney’s work.²⁹

District and Circle is littered with such descriptions of tools that are weapons. The second poem of the collection, a sonnet entitled ‘A Shiver’, recalls:

The way you had to stand to swing the sledge,
Your two knees locked, your lower back shock-fast
As shields in a *testudo*, spine and waist
A pivot for the tight-braced, tilting rib-cage;
The way its iron head planted the sledge
Unyieldingly as a club-footed last;
The way you had to heft and then half-rest
Its gathered force like a long-nursed rage
About to be let fly;

(p. 5)

Here, the ‘braced-greaves’ and warrior-like stance of ‘The Turnip-Snedder’ are echoed in the ‘shock-fast’ figure of the wielder of the sledge-hammer. Again, the terse diction and tight form of the poem, riveted with caesuras, suggests self-defence against nature – a sense which is brought into focus with the simile ‘As shields in a *testudo*’, which refers to

²⁶ Heaney, ‘Digging’, *Death of a Naturalist*, p. 3-4 (p. 4).

²⁷ Thomas, ‘The *Georgics* of Resistance’, p. 140

²⁸ Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Fallon, p. 11.

²⁹ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Pitchfork’, *Seeing Things*, p. 23. *Seeing Things* opens with a translation of ‘The Golden Bough’ section of *Aeneid* VI. For more on the transition in Heaney from Dantean Virgil to Latin Virgil see Florence Impens, *Classical Presences in Irish Poetry After 1960: The Answering Voice* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 56-60.

the impenetrable ‘tortoise’ formation employed by the Roman Army. Further tension is wound up in the compound description of ‘a long-nursed rage’, an oxymoronic and ambiguous turn of phrase that is then compounded by a question in the present tense, announcing the withheld volta: ‘does it do you good | To have known it in your bones, directable, | Withholdable at will[?]’ (p. 5). This turning point holds the weight of the sonnet in balance; there is something superhuman, even Herculean, about the physical force of the hammer swing, yet vulnerability and apprehension emerge in the shiver sent down the spine from the handle.

In the poem ‘Antaeus’ in *North* (but written earlier, in 1966), Heaney identifies himself and his voice with that of the mythical figure Antaeus, who draws his power from the earth.³⁰ In a partner piece in *North* entitled ‘Hercules and Antaeus’, which is a darker version of the earlier poem, the emphasis is instead on the challenger, the victorious Hercules, who defeats Antaeus by lifting him up into the air, thus separating him from the ground.³¹ The sequencing of these two poems – the one commencing the first section of *North*, the other at its close – symbolises a shift in outlook for Heaney, from the ‘earthed’ to the ‘heady’. In ‘A Shiver’, as elsewhere throughout *District and Circle*, Heaney returns to the symbolism of this mythology, but this time he seems more aware of the pitfalls of both perspectives, the grounded and lifted.

³⁰ In his seventieth birthday speech, given at the Royal Hospital in Kilmalsham, Dublin on 13 April 2009, Heaney remarked in relation to his early poem ‘Antaeus’: ‘I identified with this earth man because I saw myself as something of an earth man’: see Heaney, cited in Impens, *Classical Presences in Irish Poetry After 1960*, p. 49.

³¹ Heaney had already identified something positive in the image of Hercules, remarking in an interview with John Haffenden that mythical figure represented ‘another voice, another possibility’: see John Haffenden, *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 69-70. Heaney was also aware of the myth’s more troubling associations in his poetry, that it ‘came to seem like a myth of colonisation almost’, with Antaeus symbolic of the ‘native, earth-grubber’ and Hercules the ‘intelligent and superior interloper’: see Heaney, quoted in Haffenden, pp. 69-70. For more on the postcolonial implications of the Antaeus and Hercules myth in Heaney see Brian Arkins, and Patrick F. Sheeran, ‘Coloniser and Colonised: The Myth of Hercules and Antaeus in Seamus Heaney’s *North*’, *Classical and Modern Literature*, 10.2 (1990), 127-34, and Deepika Bahri, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 76-87.

A sense of forces held in the balance informs Heaney's use of language throughout the collection. As the poet muses on the responsibility that comes with the mastery of tools – the 'power to bind and loose', as he puts it in another sonnet entitled 'Súgán' (Irish for 'rope') – there is also the impression that Heaney is weighing up the value of his inherited martial metaphors, and that he might not be as comfortable as he once was with the implied violence in descriptions of manual labour. 'The Turnip-Snedder' ends with the lines:

'This is the way that God sees life,'
it said, 'from seedling-braird to snedder,'

as the handle turned
and turnip-heads were let fall and fed

to the juiced-up inner blades,
'This is the turnip-cycle,'

as it dropped its raw sliced mess,
bucketful by glistering bucketful.³²
(pp. 3-4)

It is thought that the first element of the word 'turnip' derives from the English noun 'turn', describing its rounded shape (*OED*). Here, Heaney can be seen to rotate the root vegetable in what resembles a verbal churning device, in the process revealing the crop's significance. Among its many meanings, the term 'revolution' can describe both the movement of a wheel on an axis and cyclical recurrences such as seasonal cycles. In this sense, the turning of the 'inner-blades' of the machine articulates the entire life cycle of the root vegetable.

A 'turnip-cycle' also proved instrumental in bringing about the 'British Agricultural Revolution', an upheaval in agriculture which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though its significance is now contested, the introduction of the

³² The phrase 'This is the way that God sees life' is taken from Hugh MacDiarmid's poem 'With the Herring Fishers', *Collected Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, prepared by John C. Weston (New York: The Macmillan Company; London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1967), p. 225. Whereas in MacDiarmid's poem the phrase is invoked in a positive sense, Heaney highlights its more sinister potential in his poem.

turnip from Holland to English crop rotations, made famous by Charles Viscount Townshend (also known as ‘Turnip Townshend’), increased yields and was therefore interpreted as a contributing factor to dramatic changes in the rural landscape.³³ As Anthony Low has pointed out, however, such changes took place first in the English mental landscape and then in the physical landscape. From the Renaissance onwards there was, according to Low, a ‘georgic revolution of the mind’, by which major and minor poets helped to change the attitudes of England’s leaders towards the virtues of husbandry, thus paving the way for wide-scale improvements in agriculture.³⁴ A key factor in this ‘georgic revolution’ was civil war. In the poem, it is possible to detect Heaney turning over these more violent origins of the root crop in the English language. Indeed, the phrase ‘turnip-heads’ is suggestive of the way Heaney’s writing is haunted by more extreme acts of revolution, recalling the ‘turnip-man’s lopped head’ in ‘A Northern Hoard’ in *Wintering Out*, which is also troublingly described by Heaney in that poem as the ‘Death mask of harvest’.³⁵

The source of Heaney’s discomfort can be excavated from his review of Barrell and Bull’s edition of *English Pastoral Verse* in 1975, where he expressed an aversion to the ‘commendation of progressive agricultural England’ in Neo-Augustan eighteenth-century poems written in the georgic mode.³⁶ Considering the historical and cultural associations with the georgic in English literature, it is understandable why a Northern-

³³ For the truth behind the myth of ‘Turnip Townshend’ and the origins of what has come to be known as the Norfolk four course crop rotation, see Eric Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution* (1967) (Abingdon. Oxon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 270-76, and more recently Mark Overton, *The Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-7.

³⁴ Low, p. 221. Low adopts the term ‘georgics of the mind’ from Francis Bacon, a writer he claims was instrumental in initiating a scientific-led georgic revolution, and one who in *The Advancement of Learning* remarks on Virgil: ‘these Georgickes of the mind concerning the husbandry & tillage thereof, are no less worthy then the heroical descriptions of *virtue, duty, & felicity*’: see Francis Bacon, *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, ed. by Alan Stewart and others, 16 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996—) IV: *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 134-35. ‘The Advancement of Learning’ is the title of an anti-pastoral poem in Heaney’s first collection *Death of a Naturalist* (pp. 8-9).

³⁵ Seamus Heaney, ‘A Northern Hoard: 4. No Sanctuary’, *Wintering Out*, p. 42.

³⁶ Heaney, ‘In the Country of Convention’, p. 179.

Irish born writer from the Catholic community might hold reservations about ideological implications of adopting georgic conventions. Karen O'Brien has shown how in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many poets viewed the georgic as an opportunity to pay homage to the source of an expanding British Empire.³⁷ If, in his early work, Heaney demonstrates a marked ambivalence with regards to his pastoral heritage, the same would appear to be the case with the georgic tradition later in his career. It is telling that in his review of Fallon's *Georgics*, apart from a passing reference to Dryden, there is no mention of the eighteenth-century georgic tradition in English. Rather, Heaney compares Fallon's version to the poetry of Dylan Thomas and is also at pains to stress the Irish heritage of the modern translator of the *Georgics*, C. Day Lewis.³⁸

District and Circle represents Heaney's attempt to brand the subject matter of georgic poetry with marginal and Celtic properties. His language in 'The Turnip-Snedder', for instance, is sourced from a rural dialect lexicon as well as one steeped in an English literary heritage. The use of the adjective 'glistening' in the final line is one such instance and emphasises the split personality of the poem as a whole. Etymologically speaking, the verb 'glisten' (a synonym for 'glitter') corresponds to the Middle Dutch *glisteren*, with Heaney importing it from Holland much like the turnip and planting it firmly in the home soil of his upbringing in Northern Ireland (*OED*). The archaic status of the word, coupled with the fact that it is now only preserved in certain dialects, further accentuates its suggestiveness of provincality – though this is not before it has passed through the centre of the English canon. Both verbal and adjectival forms are used numerous times in the works of Shakespeare, most famously in the well-known adage from *The Merchant of Venice* 'All that glisters is not gold'.³⁹ The anti-monetary implications of Shakespeare's use of this expression are also applicable to Heaney's

³⁷ O'Brien.

³⁸ Heaney, 'Glory Be to the World', p. 10.

³⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. by M. M. Mahood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), II. 7. 65.

poem and throw into relief its ambiguous conclusion. The image of the ‘raw sliced mess’ in the closing lines serves as a reminder of past atrocities, yet the ‘glistening bucketful’ of turnips could also be a celebration of the harvest of the root vegetable of English georgic improvement.

The welding together of georgic and Gaelic elements in *District and Circle* comes to a head in ‘Poet to Blacksmith’, which takes the form (as a note to the poem explains) of ‘Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin’s (1748-84) instructions to Séamus MacGearailt, translated from the Irish’ (p. 25). Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin was an eighteenth-century Munster poet most famous for his *aisling* poems. Heaney, however, chooses instead to translate the lesser known ‘A Séamais, déan dom’, in which the speaker instructs his blacksmith friend to forge him a spade. His translation begins:

Séamus, make me a side-arm to take on the earth,
A suitable tool for digging and grubbing the ground,
Lightsome and pleasant to lean on or cut with or lift,
Tastily finished and trim and right for the hand.
(p. 25)

Cóilín Owens observes how the instrument in Eoghan Rua’s original version is

dignified as “*féinidh arm na bhfód*,” literally a ‘personal implement of the sod’ (evidently of land under potato cultivation or of a turf-bank). But the phrase “*féinidh arm*” may also imply a gesture towards a side-arm or weapon, whether for the defense [*sic*] of self (“*arm dom fhéin*”) or of *bfód na hÉireann* (‘the auld sod’). This sentiment, one should note, carried with it an acrid whiff of sedition, since under the Popery Laws, Catholics of Eoghan Rua’s time were forbidden to bear arms.⁴⁰

Owens traces this strain of ‘nationalist political resistance’ back to Heaney’s ‘Digging’, and in *District and Circle* the spectre of a poetry of resistance resurfaces. This reading chimes with Thomas’s interpretation of ‘Digging’ as a poem written in the tradition of a ‘*Georgics* of resistance’.⁴¹ As much as there is a martial streak in the poet’s words to the blacksmith, there is also a moral weight to his instructions. Reading Eoghan Rua’s

⁴⁰ Cóilín Owens, ‘Joint Turbary: Heaney’s “Digging” and Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin’s “A Séamais, déan dom”’, *Irish Studies South*, 1.1 (2014), 50-59 (p. 52).

⁴¹ Owens, p. 50; Thomas, ‘The *Georgics* of Resistance’, pp. 131, 133-34, 143-46.

original, Heaney would be sensitive to the fact that the poet was of a class who were educated in rural ‘hedge-schools’ and would also have been aware, as Owens states, that the failure of Eoghan Rua’s own hedge-school meant that he had to engage in manual labour, often writing poems for payment or subsistence.⁴² In an interview, Heaney speaks of associating the writing of *District and Circle* with ‘being more focused, more alone, more at work in Glanmore Cottage’, having previously described Glanmore as his own ‘hedge-school’ in *Field Work*.⁴³ In *Electric Light*, Heaney addresses ‘my hedge-schoolmaster Virgil’, raising the possibility that it is not only Eoghan Rua whom Heaney is translating in ‘Poet to Blacksmith’ but also, in more subtle ways, Virgil. As such, the martial elements of the tools are imbued with the didactic and moral elements of the *Georgics*. In the poem preceding ‘Poet to Blacksmith’, ‘The Harrow-Pin’, Heaney describes the ‘hammered iron’ of the pin as ‘correction’s veriest unit’, while ‘The Midnight Anvil’ casts Eoghan Rua’s words to the blacksmith as lines to chime in the millennium (pp. 23-24).⁴⁴ Heaney’s original intention was to adopt ‘The Midnight Anvil’ as the title for the collection but he reconsidered after concluding that there was something ‘too heroic’ in the phrase; another poem, ‘Planting the Alder’, provided him with an alternative, but this time the phrase suggested ‘too much comfort’.⁴⁵

District and Circle was Heaney’s first collection to address the conditions – in Ireland and beyond – of the twenty-first century, with the hammer blows sounded in ‘The Midnight Anvil’, for example, broadcast across the Atlantic down a ‘cellular phone’ and heard by the blacksmith’s nephew in Edmonton, Alberta (p. 26). As such, the world the poems describe is of a different kind from that of *Electric Light* and Heaney’s earlier work. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 may have brought peace to Northern Ireland,

⁴² Owens, p. 51-52.

⁴³ Heaney, cited in O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 407; Heaney, ‘Glanmore Sonnets: II’, *Field Work*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ The blacksmith of ‘The Midnight Anvil’ is the very same figure as in Heaney’s earlier poem ‘The Forge’ in *Door into the Dark* (p. 7).

⁴⁵ Seamus Heaney, ‘One Poet in Search of a Title’, *Times*, 25 March 2006, section 4, p. 7.

but with the new millennium came further violent episodes of a more far-reaching kind. The fallout from the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001, and on the London Underground on 7 July 2005, can be felt throughout the collection. As much as *District and Circle* focuses on the local and familial, it also speaks of wider concerns such as these: it focuses on both the local (District) and the global (Circle). In his essay on Hughes, Heaney describes how in his maturity ‘the poetry [Virgil] wrote had a tragic visionary quality, darkened by a sense of his own country’s history of war [...] and further darkened by a feeling of responsibility for the threatened world which he had lived to see’.⁴⁶ It is worth repeating these words here, for in Heaney’s own mature verse he increasingly paints the entire world as threatened. In order to appreciate the importance of the influence of Virgil and Hughes – as well as others – on Heaney’s worldlier outlook in *District and Circle*, it is first necessary to circle back to the Heaney of 1979 and his collection *Field Work*, in particular to a poem in which his rural district is invaded by outside forces.

Georgics ‘In Extremis’

In the third poem of *Field Work*, ‘The Toome Road’, the speaker is back in the Northern Ireland of the poet’s childhood and describes the engines of war infiltrating the rural setting:

One morning early I met armoured cars
In convoy, warbling along on powerful tyres,
All camouflaged with broken alder branches,
And headphoned soldiers standing up in turrets.
How long were they approaching down my roads
As if they owned them? The whole country was sleeping.
I had rights-of-way, fields, cattle in my keeping⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Heaney, ‘Suffering and Decision’, p. 221.

⁴⁷ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Toome Road’, *Field Work*, p. 15.

Here, the conventional images of the pastoral are altered by the presence of armed forces: the ‘alder branches’ which provided refuge for Heaney in ‘Exposure’, the final poem of the previous collection *North*, are here ‘broken’ and used as camouflage, while the ‘powerful tyres’ of the ‘armoured cars’ are described as ‘warbling’ – a term usually used to describe melodious singing, especially of birds (*OED*). The soldiers, meanwhile, remain ‘headphoned’ and ignorant of the impact their presence has upon the countryside, which in turn, for Heaney, constitutes a violation of the lyric utterance.

In an essay on ‘War Pastorals’, Edna Longley remarks that ‘there is no clear line between pastoral and georgic (equally ‘artificial’ in Virgil’s hands): modes that represent poles of the lyric poem itself.’⁴⁸ In the same essay, Longley coins the term ‘interrupted georgic’ for poems ‘in which war or latent epic infiltrates an agricultural scenario’, using the example of Edward Thomas’s ‘As the team’s head brass’.⁴⁹ In the same year, Heaney identified ‘As the team’s head brass’ as his favourite poem by that poet:

It may be pitched low, but there’s a Homeric plane to Thomas’s narrative in this particular case: the dailiness, the dialogue that is integral to the action, the shadowing of the scene in the foreground (ploughman and poet in conversation), by what’s going on out of shot (the lovers in the wood, the war in Flanders) [...] In each case the big wheel of danger is turning above and beyond the poignant and the ordinary.⁵⁰

Read in light of Heaney’s comments about Thomas’s poem, ‘The Toome Road’ could itself be characterised as an ‘interrupted georgic’: it too is ‘pitched low’ in the daily grind and the ordinary cycles of agricultural life, yet also overshadowed by ‘wheels of danger’ in the foreground, as well as larger, ‘latent epic’ wheels further afield. The speaker’s responsibilities as a landowner and keeper of livestock implicate him in the scene as the only witness to the military’s manoeuvres; he has ‘rights-of-way’ and yet his presence

⁴⁸ Edna Longley, ‘War Pastorals’, in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 461-82 (p. 462).

⁴⁹ Longley, ‘War Pastorals’, p. 466.

⁵⁰ Seamus Heaney, in *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*, ed. by Guy Cuthbertson and Lucy Newlyn (London: Enitharmon Press, 2007), p. 134.

also constitutes an implicit defiance of the political forces at work in the poem. As the final lines proclaim:

Sowers of seed, erectors of headstones . . .
O charioteers, above your dormant guns,
It stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass,
The invisible, untoppled omphalos.⁵¹

It is unclear from the grammar whether the reference to ‘sowers of seeds’ and ‘erectors of headstones’ refers to the local population or the military. Heaney’s description of the soldiers as ‘charioteers’ is more targeted, echoing Virgil’s condemnation of warmongering at the end of Book I of the *Georgics*. The final two lines are also an act of defiance, as Heaney’s prose illuminates: ‘I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world,’ he states in the first essay in *Preoccupations*.⁵² Heaney’s preoccupation with this word, which he uses to describe the pump in the yard at his childhood home at Mossbawn, provides both a conceptual and a historical context for the action of ‘The Toome Road’:

It is Co. Derry in the early 1940’s. The American bombers groan towards the aerodrome at Toomebridge, the American troops manoeuvre in the fields along the road, but all that great historical action does not disturb the rhythms of the yard.⁵³

At this point, the speaker of the poem and the essay merge into one. It was Heaney’s early influence, Patrick Kavanagh, who, invoking the ghost of Homer, asked which is ‘most important’: the parish dispute or larger historical machinations?⁵⁴ In ‘The Toome Road’, Heaney provides a personal and political answer, inverting traditional hierarchies by putting parish before *polis*, the arts of peace before the arms of war.

It is no coincidence that Heaney praised Thomas’s ‘As the team’s head brass’ in such terms only a year after the publication of *District and Circle*. In the poem ‘Anahorish 1944’ from that collection, Heaney returns to the landscape, practices, and

⁵¹ Heaney, ‘The Toome Road’, p. 15.

⁵² Seamus Heaney, ‘Mossbawn’, *Preoccupations*, pp. 17-27 (p. 17).

⁵³ Heaney, ‘Mossbawn’, p. 17.

⁵⁴ Kavanagh, ‘Epic’.

preoccupations of his childhood environment, remembering a time when wartime and peacetime activities were more violently conflated:

‘We were killing pigs when the Americans arrived.
A Tuesday morning, sunlight and gutter-blood
Outside the slaughterhouse. From the main road
They would have heard the squealing,
Then heard it stop and had a view of us
In our gloves and aprons coming down the hill.
Two lines of them, guns on shoulders, marching.
Armoured cars and tanks and open jeeps.

(p. 7)

Here, the poem closely resembles the ‘interrupted georgic’ form of ‘The Toome Road’.

Indeed, the location, tone, and scenario of the two poems is remarkably similar, notwithstanding the fact that the later work is enclosed in quotation marks, suggesting a further distance from the event described.⁵⁵ In an interview with John Kelly for the broadcaster RTE in 2006, Heaney confirms that the poem is written in the voices of his former neighbours in County Derry, the Gibbins, who owned a slaughterhouse.⁵⁶ In a development of the themes of ‘The Toome Road’, the violent presence of the military is mirrored in the habitual and the ordinary activities of the rural population. The imagined perspective of the Americans’ view of the locals in their bloody aprons is even more shocking in this instance than the locals’ view of the soldiers – or at least in the moment – for the poem is written in hindsight with the knowledge that the soldiers were soon to depart for the D-Day beaches of Northern France. In this sense, the ‘gutter blood’ of the slaughterhouse anticipates the slaughter of troops on the battlefields. In an echo of Thomas’s ‘As the team’s head brass’, battlefield and home front are conflated.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Michael Parker observes that unlike the British forces of ‘The Toome Road’, ‘the American military seem to be regarded not as invaders and occupiers but rather as transient, benevolent visitants’: see Michael Parker, ‘Fallout from the Thunder: Poetry and Politics in Seamus Heaney’s *District and Circle*’, *Irish Studies Review*, 16.4 (November 2008), 369-84 (p. 371).

⁵⁶ ‘The View Presents Seamus Heaney’, *The View Presents*, RTÉ One, 18 April 2006. For more on the figure of the neighbour in Heaney, see Conor Carville, ‘“Heaney and the Neighbour”: Poetry Between Politics and Ethics’, *Textual Practice*, 28.4 (2014), 517-92.

⁵⁷ Thomas’s ‘As the team’s head brass’ also appears to have inspired Heaney to return to the ‘violent harvest’ georgic motif of his earlier work; in the ‘The Tollund Man in Springtime’ he writes in the voice of the excavated figure from *Wintering Out*: ‘Faith placed in me, me faithless as a stone | The harrow turned up when the crop was sown’ (Heaney, *District and Circle*, p. 56).

In his Nobel lecture, Heaney argues that it is ‘difficult at times to repress the thought that history is about as instructive as an abattoir’, and such a view informs many of the poems in the collection.⁵⁸ ‘Polish Sleepers’, for example, senses the ‘wafts of what conspired’ during the holocaust in twentieth-century Europe in the ‘tarry puss’ of railway sleepers imported from Poland (p. 6). Yet the sleepers are recycled in another sense, ‘laid and landscaped in a kerb, | A moulded verge’ (p. 6). The domestic repurposing of the historically laden object hints at Heaney’s objectives for the volume as a whole, and suggests how there might be something constructive in historical accounts of the interactions between military violence and the rustic. Another poem in *District and Circle*, ‘Edward Thomas on the Lagans Road’, imagines Thomas himself walking down the roads of Heaney’s childhood district, ‘demobbed’ in ‘his khaki tunic’, a literary incarnation of the ‘Unknown, unnamed’ soldiers of ‘Anahorish 1944’ (p. 35). As in Thomas’s poem, Heaney’s homage commences with the disappearance of two local lovers, ‘Eamon Murphy and Teresa Brennan’, and Thomas himself is compared to ‘one of the Evans brothers out of Leitrim’.⁵⁹ Despite the horrors of both world wars, and in Heaney’s lifetime civil strife in Northern Ireland, the poem suggests that there remains something of value in the everyday, the familiar, and the rooted.

If ‘Anahorish 1944’ remembers the manoeuvres of American troops in Co. Derry in the 1940s, as described in the early essay ‘Mossbawn’, then the poem ‘The Aerodrome’ recalls the American air activity at the nearby aerodrome at Toomebridge.⁶⁰ This is just one instance of Heaney circling back in the collection, going over the same historical ground but from a new perspective informed by his later musings on the

⁵⁸ Heaney, ‘Crediting Poetry’, p. 456.

⁵⁹ In Heaney’s poem ‘In a Field’, published posthumously in 2013 and written as a direct response to ‘As the team’s head brass’, a ‘demobbed’ figure is seen to walk ‘the turned-up acres of our back field’: see Seamus Heaney, ‘In a Field’, in *1914: Poetry Remembers*, ed. by Carol Ann Duffy (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 94.

⁶⁰ Heaney, ‘Mossbawn’, *Preoccupations*, p. 17.

georgic qualities of Thomas, Kavanagh, and especially Virgil and Hughes. 'If self is a location, so is love', the poem declares:

Bearings taken, markings, cardinal points,
Options, obstinacies, dug heels and distance,
Here and there and now and then, a stance.
(p. 12)

Here, then, the violent stance of 'The Turnip-Snedder' and the hammer wielder becomes a position of love. Love is also figured as a location – one's own district and circle, home ground and family home, as it was and in the present. The poem is both an elegy for the aerodrome itself (now 'The Creagh Meadows Industrial Estate') but also for Heaney's mother, with the familiarity of the place metonymically standing in for the family member (p. 12). The aerodrome may represent 'heady' distances for Heaney: particularly, perhaps, his distance from his parents, since he followed poetry to other shores and circles. Nevertheless, his heels are still 'dug' in and he remains 'earthed' by his connection to the place.

There is a resolution in Heaney's poetry to stand one's ground in the face of war, but also to stand side-by-side with the people of your district in the face of larger historical events. The poem 'Anything Can Happen', which is possibly a response to Auden's 'Poetry makes nothing happen', directly follows 'The Aerodrome' and transfigures a Second World War aircraft into passenger planes commandeered by terrorists in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. Again, Heaney draws classical parallels, this time adapting Horace's *Odes* (I. 34):

Ground gives. The heaven's weight
Lifts up off Atlas like a kettle-lid.
Capstones shift. Nothing resettles right.
Telluric ash and fire-spores boil away.
(p. 13)

The act of translation is crucial to the effect of the poem, which was originally published in collaboration with the human rights organisation Amnesty International, and raises the question of what lessons have been learnt from the history of classical civilisations. The

publication takes the form of an essay by Heaney accompanied by twenty-three further translations of his adaptation of Horace in various languages. In his essay, Heaney says that the poem

addresses itself to a place in the psyche that Ted Hughes called “the place of ultimate suffering and decision”, and as nations and people, we have all been driven to the threshold of that place. Acts of coldly premeditated terror, carefully premeditated acts of war, have been experienced by everyone partly as assimilable facts of day-to-day life[.]⁶¹

Once again, the extraordinary is assimilated into the ordinary; and again, Heaney turns to Hughes, whom in his essay ‘Suffering and Decision’ he identifies as a poet who could be said to have written his own georgics. Heaney adds that the poem ‘is about *terra tremens*, the opposite of *terra firma*’: the ground yields but not in a sense of abundance; instead, it proves too fragile for the weight of history.⁶² The notion of being grounded – as in ‘The Loose Box’ – is now an alien one in the context of global events. The above stanza is in fact not a translation, but Heaney’s own additional stanza added to his loose version of Horace. The chaos of the phrase ‘Nothing resettles right’ echoes not Horace but Virgil’s condemnation of violence at the end of Book I (505-07) of the *Georgics*, in which he states (as Fallon translates):

right and wrong are mixed up here, there’s so much warring everywhere,
evil has so many faces, and there’s no regard for the labours
of the plow.⁶³

Indeed, it would be fair to say that the sentiment of Virgil in these lines might also be defined as ‘art for amnesty,’ a call for disarmament as well as the rights of free speech.

⁶¹ Seamus Heaney, *Anything Can Happen: A Poem and Essay by Seamus Heaney with Translations in Support of Art for Amnesty* (Dublin: Townhouse, 2004), pp. 13-14.

⁶² Heaney, *Anything Can Happen*, p. 15. Commenting on the poem’s ominous evocation of ‘a clear blue sky’, Rankin Russell argues that it also ‘troubles and complicates the assumption in his poetry from *Seeing Things* through *Electric Light* that the heavens contain largely images of delight’: see Richard Rankin Russell, *Poetry and Peace: Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Northern Ireland* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 285. John Wilson Foster draws attention to ‘the frequency of such words and inflections (and, therefore, ideas and images) as *air, light, water, space, sunlight, stream, waver, lift, soul, sky, spirit, river*’ in later Heaney in John Wilson Foster, ‘Crediting Marvels: Heaney after 50’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, ed. by O’Donoghue, pp. 206-23 (p. 207).

⁶³ Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Fallon, p. 23.

As in Virgil's *Georgics*, cultivation still has a crucial role to play in the cultural and political dimensions of Heaney's later poetry. The poem 'Out of Shot' finds the speaker 'inspecting livestock, | Catching gleams of the distant Viking *vik* | Of Wicklow Bay', only to be reminded:

Of a donkey on the TV news last night –
Loosed from a cart that had loosed five mortar shells
In the bazaar district, wandering out of shot
(p. 15)

Here, home district becomes the 'bazaar district' of a foreign country undisclosed by the poet, who contemplates invasion and occupation, both of Viking forces in the middle-eastern districts of Ireland, and western forces of the so-called 'war on terror' in the Middle East. In *District and Circle*, Heaney's sense of the georgic is threatened – even superseded – by epic, where the *polis* once again takes precedent over the parish, if only for a moment. The collection's title is a reference to the well-known line of the London Underground, the location of another terrorist attack in 2005. The title poem, made up of a sequence of sonnets, addresses these events, and in doing so provides a clue to the progression of Virgil's wheel in that it contains within it the title of Heaney's next collection, *Human Chain*, as the speaker describes 'the safety of numbers': 'A crowd half straggle-ravelled and half strung | Like a human chain' (p. 18).

Heaney's comments on the development of the poem reveal how the 'double sonnet was there in May 2005; but after the July bombings, a poem called "District and Circle" was going to have to bear in mind additional scrutiny'.⁶⁴ In 'The Tollund Man in Springtime', Heaney resurrects the figure from his earlier bog poem in *North* in order to provide that sense of scrutiny, transporting him to the London Underground and turning back the wheel to focus on the rural. In the first-person address of the poem, there is the

⁶⁴ Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 410.

clear sense that this figure from the past is casting his judgement on the metropolitan crowd:

Cattle out in the rain, their knowledgeable
Solid standing and readiness to wait,
These I learned from. My study was the wet,
My head as washy as a head of kale,
Shedding water like the flanks and tail
Of every dumb beast sunk above the clout
In trampled gaps, bringing their heavyweight
Silence to bear on nosed-at sludge and puddle.
(p. 57)

The speaker's description of 'cattle out in the rain' bears a striking resemblance to Hughes's depiction of a similar scene in *Moortown Diary*, a key text in Heaney's conceptualising of a contemporary georgic tradition. The poem 'Rain', which opens Hughes's collection, describes 'water backing and brimming in grass', hedges as 'straggles of gap', and cattle waiting in the rain, hanging 'their noses to the mud'.⁶⁵ It is therefore not only the speaker who learns from the silent cattle but Heaney too, having studied Hughes's own late poems of livestock and the land. If Heaney is learning from Hughes in 'The Tollund Man at Springtime' then there is also the implication that the reader has something to learn from the speaker's grounded immersion in the natural world. For a poet who in his first collection mythologised himself as one inclined 'to pry into roots, to finger slime', there is a redemptive quality to the above lines.⁶⁶ Yet the 'heavyweight | Silence' of the poem is brought to bear on more than sludge and puddles: contemporary issues, local and global, and in particular those concerning the environment at large, are part of Heaney's concerns in this poem as well. As Heaney wrote of the resurrection of the Tollund Man in his work:

The convention is to call such a figure a 'persona' but in this case he felt more like a transfusion, and I found myself writing poems about glacier melt and river flow, crab apple and fiddlehead ferns, birch groves and alder trees.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Hughes, 'Rain', *Collected Poems*, pp. 503-04.

⁶⁶ Seamus Heaney, 'Personal Helicon', *Death of a Naturalist*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ Heaney, 'One Poet in Search of a Title', p. 7.

It is the poems of river flow and ferns, which populate the last third of *District and Circle*, that will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. In these poems, more than anywhere else, Heaney comes to articulate a stance that is contemporary and georgic.

The Husbandry of Years

District and Circle is where Heaney's voice becomes most environmentally conscious.

As the poet states to O'Driscoll, 'environmental issues have to a large extent changed the mind of poetry', suggesting that this is at least the case in his mind and his poetry.⁶⁸

Citing Alice Oswald as an example of a writer who has made such matters more of 'an explicit concern', Heaney suggests that his own verse is more 'ecological lament' that 'environmental protest', but he does maintain that in such a context 'defiance is actually part of the lyric job'.⁶⁹ In the latter half of *District and Circle*, Heaney's environmentalism could be said to be carefully balanced on the boundary between protest and lament. The poem 'Höfn', for instance, documents how glaciers have 'begun to melt' (p. 53), whereas 'Moyulla' charts the 'great vowel-shift' of his childhood river from Moyola (as in the earlier 'Gifts of Rain' in *Wintering Out*) to Moyulla (p. 59), suggesting, as Heaney notes, 'the darkening of the ecological climate, the pollution of the river over time'.⁷⁰

'Planting the Alder' is more implicit in its ecological message: 'Plant it, plant it, | Streel-head in the rain,' the final couplet of the poem commands (p. 60). Heaney took

⁶⁸ Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 407.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 407, 411. There has been an increasing trend to go beyond Heaney's own assessment in his work and to read his poetry in the context of environmentalism and ecology: see Juan Ráez Padilla, 'Seamus Heaney's Elemental Ecopoetics: Earth, Water, Air and Fire', *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 1.2 (2009), 21-30; James McElroy, 'Ecocriticism & Irish Poetry: A Preliminary Outline', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 6 (2011), 54-69; and Lidström. Alice Oswald herself includes Heaney's 'Bog Queen' and an extract from his *Sweeney Astray* ('The Trees of Ireland') in her anthology *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet*, pp. 98, 151.

⁷⁰ Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 406: see also Seamus Heaney, 'Gifts of Rain', *Wintering Out*, pp. 23-25.

refuge in alders in the poem 'Exposure' at the end of *North*, and alders provided camouflage on the armoured cars in 'The Toome Road' in *Field Work*. In *District and Circle*, Heaney explores the species' other properties. Alder trees are what is known as 'monecious', meaning that male and female flowers are found on the same plant. Heaney's description of the sapling as a 'Streel-head' refers at once to the tree's dangling catkins (male) and to the untidy, woody, cone-like appearance of the female catkins, which stay on the tree all year round. It also suggests value in the cultivation and preservation of the more 'raggle-taggle' elements of the countryside. Alders may not be picturesque, but they are unique in that they are able to survive in nutrient-poor ground and they improve the fertility of the soil in which they grow. The bogs and riverbanks of Heaney's childhood would have been heavily populated with alder trees, and so Heaney is likely to have had a knowledge of the tree's capacity for healing the land.

It is through the alder that Heaney's belief in the restoration of a sense of *patria* finds its expression in the notion of an ecological literature. David Fairer has identified in the georgic poems of the eighteenth-century what he terms the 'eco-georgic', a form of ecologically conscious writing in which 'directed activity will bear fruit' and which acknowledges the value of 'composted experience'.⁷¹ Heaney's use of the imperative in 'Planting the Alder' resonates with the didactic mode of the 'eco-georgic'. As with many of the poems in *District and Circle*, 'Planting the Alder' also demonstrates the fruits of Heaney's experience both as a poet and as an individual who is environmentally sympathetic, the culmination of 'the husbandry of years', as the poet puts it in his translation of 'Rilke: *The Apple Orchard*':

Here under trees like trees in a Dürer woodcut –
Pendent, pruned, the husbandry of years
Gravid in them until the fruit appears –
Ready to serve, replete with patience, rooted

In the knowledge that no matter how above

⁷¹ Fairer, 'The World of Eco-Georgic', pp. 212-14.

Measure or expectation, all must be
Harvested and yielded, when a long life willingly
Cleaves to what's willed and grows in mute resolve.
(p. 68)

Through Rilke, Heaney reaches back to Virgil: here is *patria* as patience, or even *patria* as piety.⁷² Heaney's *patria* is also one of appeal, even protest: a call for a cool head in the face of rising global temperatures, both political and meteorological. Like Dürer, who represents Christ as a gardener (Figure 4.2), Heaney finds in agriculture a symbol for his Catholic faith. Rooted in Heaney's more mature workings of the ground is the notion of the cultivation of the self – both in life and art, and if there is a lesson to be learned from his late work, it is that the boundaries of the self in fact encompass the whole world, and that each individual and community is implicated in their environment.

In a review of *District and Circle*, Henry Hart observes that the collection is where Heaney makes his 'agrarian stand', and that 'Heaney is as concerned about taking a stand and about the sort of ideological stands which are taken in the modern world as were those southern writers and intellectuals who published their views in *I'll Take My Stand* (1930).'⁷³ Hart is right to make the connection, but while the influence and principles of the Southern Agrarians may well have reached Heaney through his identification with the poet John Crowe Ransom, the particular constellation of writers surrounding Virgil's *Georgics* is another, more direct way in which a related but distinct

⁷² *Pietas*, which translates as dutiful conduct, religiousness, and piety, occurs a number of times in the *Georgics*: to describe the impious nature of the children of the Iron Age (1. 468), for instance, and similarly when Mars threatens peace (1. 511); it is also used in a positive sense when Virgil asks for the pious to be protected during a plague affecting cattle (3. 523). It is a far more common adjective in the *Aeneid*, however, being used to describe Aeneas's character no less than twenty-seven times, and twice by Aeneas himself.

⁷³ Henry Hart, 'Seamus Heaney: Circling Back', review of Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (2006), Daniel Tobin, *Passage to the Centre: Imagination and the Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (1999) and Floyd Collins, *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity* (2003), *The Sewanee Review*, 114.3 (Summer 2006), 456-62 (p. 459). Hart makes this connection without commenting on the conservative, arguably racist, outlook of the Southern Agrarians. For more on the way in which georgic ideals have the potential to become politically suspect – a trap which Heaney seems to have avoided – see Thomas, 'The *Georgics* of Resistance', pp. 117-18.



Figure 4.2. Albrecht Dürer, *Noli Me Tangere*, c. 1509/1510, woodcut, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

American agrarian philosophy finds its way into *District and Circle*.⁷⁴

The poet, essayist, and fiction writer Wendell Berry is in many ways the inheritor of the Southern Agrarians' position, but his protests against the rampant progress of global markets, industrial agribusiness, and environmental abuse is against the same post-9/11 world of terror, technology, and climate catastrophe that readers of Heaney's works

inhabit. It has been acknowledged that the Irish poet-translator of the *Georgics*, Peter Fallon, writes his

poetry under the direct influence of Berry.⁷⁵ It was in fact Heaney who first made the association, and considering the profound influence that Fallon's version of the *Georgics* had upon him in his later writing (as this chapter has demonstrated), it is also right to acknowledge that Heaney and Berry have much in common. If Heaney is indeed making an 'agrarian stand' in *District and Circle*, then it is one that is made with a distinctly

⁷⁴ Speaking to O'Driscoll, Heaney revealed that he read John Crowe Ransom early on (Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 75), and when Heaney came to collaborate with Hughes on *The Rattle Bag* (1982), they chose to include no less than five poems by the poet in their anthology. Additionally, in an essay in which Heaney contrasts Crowe Ransom with Thomas Hardy, he also expresses his sympathy with former poet's plight, which takes the form of the 'double focus which the poet from a regional experience is now likely to experience, caught between a need to affirm experience to his own being and a recognition that this experience is likely to be peripheral to the usual life of his age', see 'Place, Pastness, Poems: A Triptych', *Salmagundi*, 68/69 (Fall 1985-Winter 1986), 30-47 (p. 47).

⁷⁵ In a tribute to Fallon written in 1995, Heaney remarked that Fallon is 'likely to remind you of a Berry (Wendell)' and that he is also 'likely to be found' in such as place as 'a farm in Kentucky' (a reference to Berry's homestead): see Heaney, 'Tributes to Fallon: 25 Years of Gallery Press', *Irish Literary Supplement*, 14.2 (Fall 1995), 6. See also Richard Rankin Russell, 'Loss and Recovery in Peter Fallon's Pastoral Elegies', *Colby Quarterly*, 37.4 (December 2001), 343-56.

georgic concern – informed by Berry’s outlook – for our present environmental predicament.

For Berry, agriculture is at the heart of many of the environmental crimes that have taken place – and continue to take place – in the twenty-first-century; and yet it must also be at the heart of any solution. In an essay on what he perceives to be the widespread ‘Prejudice against Country People’, Berry states:

Even though we obviously must answer our questions about farming with all the intellectual power we have, we must not fail to answer them also with our affection. I mean the complex, never-completed affection for our land and our neighbors that is true patriotism.⁷⁶

For Berry, ‘true patriotism’ goes back to its roots in *patria*, a ‘complex, never-completed affection’ for land and neighbors. It is one that echoes Heaney praise of Virgil’s *Georgics* in his review of Fallon: his acknowledgement of the Latin poet’s ‘love of the land, the physical ground that is the people’s home ground’.⁷⁷ In another essay, Berry draws upon the figure of ‘the old man at Tarentum’ from Book IV of the *Georgics* in order to demonstrate the ethos of ‘subsistence agriculture’ and the inherent virtue of a way of life that associates ‘frugality’ with ‘abundance’.⁷⁸ As Berry states, ‘Virgil’s prototype [...] is a literary outcropping of an agrarian theme that has been carried from earliest times until now mostly in family or folk tradition, not in writing, though other such people can be found in books.’⁷⁹ In Heaney’s work, however, family and folk tradition stand on an equal footing with the literary world of books. In the poem ‘Quitting Time’ towards the end of *District and Circle*, Heaney returns to ‘Virgil’s prototype’ once more in modern times and in equally modern terms:

The hosed-down chamfered concrete pleases him.
He’ll wait a while before he kills the light
On the cleaned-up yard, its pails and farrowing crate,

⁷⁶ Wendell Berry, ‘The Prejudice against Country People’, in *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, ed. by Paul Kingsnorth (London: Allen Lane, 2017), pp. 202-208 (p.208).

⁷⁷ Heaney, ‘Glory Be to the World’, p.10.

⁷⁸ Wendell Berry, ‘The Agrarian Standard’, *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, ed. by Kingsnorth, pp. 133-143 (p. 138).

⁷⁹ Berry, ‘The Agrarian Standard’, p. 138.

And the cast-iron pump immobile as a herm
 Upstanding elsewhere, in another time.
 More and more this last look at the wet
 Shine of the place is what means most to him –
 And to repeat the phrase, ‘My head is light’,
 Because it often is as he reaches back
 And switches off, a home-based man at home
 In the end with little. Except this same
 Night after nightness, redding up the work,
 The song of the tubular steel gate in the dark
 As he pulls it to and starts his uphill trek.

(p. 69)

For the young Heaney, it was the revelation of reading Kavanagh’s work for the first time and his excitement at finding the ‘details of a life which [he] knew intimately – but which [he] had always considered to be below or beyond books – being presented in a book’, that emboldened him to give credit to the subject matter of his rural upbringing on a farm in rural Derry.⁸⁰ In ‘Quitting Time’, Heaney uses his now beloved sonnet form to honour the down-to-earth mentality of Kavanagh yet again, with the emphasis on ‘the habitual, the banal’ a homage to the message at the heart of ‘Epic’, but also to Kavanagh’s later sequence of ‘Canal Bank’ sonnets, in which the poet comes to see the worth of ‘plain concrete’ as well as ‘the inexhaustible adventure of a gravelled yard’.⁸¹

It has been observed that in Heaney’s sonnet the figure is representative of the poet’s father, or perhaps even constitutes a ‘veiled self-portrait’.⁸² In this sense, the poem anticipates the overarching motif of *Human Chain*, in which Heaney echoes Aeneas’s journey into the underworld to meet his father, and which he translates in his version of Book VI of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. But ‘Quitting Time’ is not primarily written in terms of epic conventions, neither could it be said to be a pastoral or an anti-pastoral poem in the vein of Kavanagh. Another possibility is that the figure stands in for Heaney’s brother, Hugh,

⁸⁰ Heaney, ‘The Placeless Heaven’, p. 7.

⁸¹ See Patrick Kavanagh, ‘Canal Bank Walk’ and ‘The Hospital’, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Quinn, pp. 224, 217.

⁸² Parker, ‘Poetry and Politics in Seamus Heaney’s *District and Circle*’, p. 379; Adam Kirsch, ‘Seamus Heaney: Digging with the Pen’, *Harvard Magazine*, November-December 2006, <<https://harvardmagazine.com/node/2623>> [accessed 19 April 2018].

who stayed in the local area where Heaney grew up and made his living as a farmer. Hugh would have been a first-hand witness to the modernisation of agriculture in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the period of Heaney's career, and such changes are registered in the poem, with its 'chamfered concrete' and 'tubular steel' gates – gates that nonetheless possess the qualities of a 'song'.⁸³

In 'Quitting Time', the farmer figure, who is also a family figure, is much like Heaney's 'untoppled omphalos' in the form of a familiar 'cast-iron pump', which in this poem remains upstanding, 'immobile as a herm.' A herm, or 'herma' is a statue that takes the form of a head or torso, usually of the god Hermes, on top of a quadrangular pillar. These four-square structures were used by the Greeks and taken up by the Romans as boundary markers, mile stones, and sign posts. In Heaney's poem, the classical figure of Virgil's 'old man of Tarentum', a farmer who himself seems to be from 'another time', is yet another survivor from the Roman era, and one who is also no less relevant for being marginal and timeless. He may be 'a home-based man at home | In the end with little' but in his humble stature he comes to embody a lesson – one that is as central to Heaney as it is to Berry. Frugality gives rise to abundance and life, as well as writing, is all the better for being conducted within its limits.

It is not with the alder or apple tree that Heaney ends *District and Circle*, but the birch and the beech in the poems which occur towards the end of the collection 'The Birch Grove' and 'In a Loaning'. In this way, Heaney is echoing the closing remarks of Virgil's *Georgics*, in which the mature poet reflects on his earlier self and works (IV. 563-66):

And I, Virgil, was lying in the lap of Naples, quite at home
In the studies of the arts of peace, I, who once amused myself
With rustic rhymes, and, still a callow youth,
Sang of you, Tityrus, as I lounged beneath the reach of one great beech.⁸⁴

⁸³ O'Donoghue touches upon the up-to-date material references in 'Quitting Time', though in his view the poem 'serves to exorcise the violent association of sluicing, by showing it to be also a normal cleansing of the farmyard at the end of the working day': see O'Donoghue, p. 120, n. 22.

⁸⁴ Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Fallon, p. 94.

Heaney's studies in the arts of peace throughout his career demonstrate a progression from pastoral to environmental concerns. As such, his mature agricultural poetry is located in that no-man's-land that lies between pastoral and ecopoetry – an area that has so far remained unduly neglected by environmental critics, but which could fruitfully be examined in the context of a georgic tradition. Heaney's eco-georgic laments are neither nostalgic nor wholly dogmatic. Instead, he appeals to a way of life and way of writing that in modern times has been, and remains, overlooked.

CHAPTER V

The Poet in the Garden: Little Sparta and Alice Oswald's Lyrics

Gardener

Where is your armistice?

Vita Sackville-West, *The Garden*¹

The vandal's hammer is the same as the sculptor's; and every gardener knows that cultivation involves a lot of brute destruction, pruning, and cutting back to the ground.

Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*²

'If the phrase must be used', says Alice Oswald, 'then a nature poet is someone concerned with things being outside each other.'³ As has already been established, Oswald's suspicion of the term 'nature poet' is itself revealing. Even more telling is her attempt at a satisfactory definition. For her, a 'nature poet' is someone concerned with 'things' – not just objects but plants and animals. Furthermore, her concern is with how these things exist separately and contrary to one another. She inquires, 'how should extrinsic forms, man and earth for example, come into contact?'.⁴ An inquiry into Oswald's 'nature poetry' (if the phrase is to be used) must therefore remain alive to the point of contact: between person and earth, between things, between the poet and the environment. If Oswald is first and foremost interested in things being distinct, then significant things happen in her poetry when they meet.

¹ Vita Sackville-West, *The Garden* (London: Michael Joseph, 1946), p. 74.

² Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 160.

³ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain Makes the World Alive with Noise', p. 40.

⁴ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 40.

For Oswald, the poet must remain wary of anything that may come between themselves and other things. Much like the legendary figure of Midas, the writer – who for Oswald is hubristically a ‘King of Paper’ – is at risk of looking at the world in terms of a hierarchy (subject above object) and therefore only seeing his own image reflected back at him.⁵ As she puts it in her lecture on Ted Hughes, it is a condition encouraged by literary convention and leaves the reader feeling ‘comfortable, melancholy, inert. Nostalgic. Dishonest.’⁶ When the world is mediated by a piece of paper, she says in an interview, ‘there’s something eclipsing things’.⁷

Unlike her long-standing inspiration Homer, as a poet writing out of a literate culture Oswald cannot hope to bypass the mediating screen of the page – or, for that matter, the computer screen itself. The role of the poet, according to her, is to reduce as much as possible the abstractions of thought, thereby keeping the language honest. The way this is achieved is through work, both the experience of it and the writing that evokes, or even entails, that experience. In Oswald’s lyric collections, *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* (1996) and *Woods etc.*, her poetry can be characterised as a sustained interrogation of what it means to know the environment through work, and while this question also governs her book-length poems *Dart* and *Memorial*, her lyric collections are distinct in that they consistently evoke the practice of gardening as the primary occupation through which to channel such an interrogation.

The first poem of Oswald’s first collection, ‘Pruning in Frost’, positions the gardener-speaker in a world characterised as if not hostile then certainly resistant to any human designs upon it:

Last night, without a sound,
a ghost of a world lay down on a world,

trees like dream-wrecks
corralled with increments of frost.

⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

⁶ Oswald, ‘Wild Things’.

⁷ Oswald, cited in Cox.

Found crevices
and wound and wound
the clock-spring cobwebs.

All life's ribbon frozen mid-fling.

Oh I am
stone thumbs,
feet of glass.

Work knocks in me the winter's nail.⁸

In Oswald's poetry, work is passive as well as active; with each clip of the pruning shears the surface of the self is pierced by the cold and hard contrariness of 'outside' things. Here, the environment is no mere reflection of the speaker's thoughts, as in Spenser, but rather, as in Hughes's 'Thistles' for instance, it is 'fighting back over the same ground'.⁹ As the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty observes, '[thought] only thinks its object by assimilating it, by constituting it, by transforming it into thought' – in other words, by abstracting it.¹⁰ The body, on the other hand, 'is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world'.¹¹ In 'Pruning in Frost', and throughout Oswald's poetry, contact with the outside world occurs not in the mind but at the fingertips, on the surface of the skin, with the creep of each footstep. Oswald's poems draw attention to the body as a 'thing among things' put into contact with their environment primarily through work. In 'Pruning in Frost', the speaker eventually ends up 'getting carved' just like the plants and trees by the active/passive action of manual labour, becoming yet another solid element in the fabric of life – 'All life's ribbon frozen mid-fling.'

⁸ Alice Oswald, 'Pruning in Frost', *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; repr. London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 3; all further references to poems from this collection are taken from the Faber edition, hereafter *TGSS*; references will occur in parentheses.

⁹ Hughes, 'Thistles', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Keegan, p. 147. The poem stands as a homage to Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' and invokes the work of Robert Frost. Oswald anthologises both poets in *The Thunder Mutters*.

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 162-63; for a reading of Merleau-Ponty's perception in relation to Heidegger's theory of 'dwelling' see Ingold, pp. 168-169.

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, p. 163.

Images of manual labour in Oswald's poetry – her speakers' 'effort[s] to penetrate matter' (in a phrase borrowed by Oswald from Richard Poirier) – are manifested in verse that is highly wrought, rhythmically assured, and yet at times resistant to convention.¹² 'I build my poems out of discreet blocks of sound and grammar with huge gaps in between them,' Oswald explains.¹³ Building a poem is a different notion from writing one and suggests a re-arrangement of existing materials as opposed to the thinking up of new ones. It is an idea she excavates from Homer and the oral tradition, but its foundation can also be found in Heidegger, who asserts in *Poetry, Language, Thought* that poetry 'is a kind of building'.¹⁴ As Heidegger states, language can be unwieldy and, as the power dynamic between the writer and the words is inverted, the poet 'hits upon strange maneuvers [sic]'.¹⁵ In Oswald's poetry, language pushes back. The poet is therefore forced to employ the use of tools which aid her in her negotiations with the stubbornness of words: pruning shears, or a spade ('it speaks in short lines of trochees and dactyls'), or a rake, 'a rhythmical but not predictable instrument that connects the earth to our hands'.¹⁶

Prosody, in such a formulation, is equivalent to digging and raking and facilitates a point of contact with the natural world. Oswald herself turns to Heidegger when invoking the importance of tools:

To quote Heidegger (because his name's appropriate): 'the less we just stare at the hammer-thing and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does

¹² Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 40. The full quotation cited by Oswald is as follows: 'manual labour in Frost is often an image of the effort to penetrate matter. Such penetration is the precondition for the discovery of an intermediate realm where something in the self and something in things can meet in a system of approximations': see Poirier, p. 279. In the original, both 'things' and 'system of approximations' are quotations from Emerson's 'Nature' (1946), suggesting that, just as Oswald's Frost is related to Poirier's Frost, so too is her Emerson: see *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Richard Poirier (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 234-47 (p. 244). Elsewhere in the same essay, Oswald quotes Emerson herself: 'One way of expressing this attitude to meaning, that it always operates within a work-world, is to suggest, through the notation of poetry, a series of separated frames – something like Emerson's circles: "the natural world may be conceived as a system of concentric circles, and we now and then detect in Nature slight dislocations, which appraise us that this surface on which we now stand is not fixed, but sliding". A form establishing and breaking itself as it goes' ('Universe in Time of Rain', p. 41): see *Emerson*, ed. by Poirier, pp. 171-72.

¹³ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 41.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), p. 213. I return to the question of oral composition techniques in relation to Oswald's poetry in chapter VI.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 213.

¹⁶ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 40; Oswald, 'Introduction: The Dew's Harp', p. ix.

our relation to it become and the more unveiledly it is encountered as that which it is...'.¹⁷

The name is appropriate, in a philosophical, a metrical, and a material sense:

Heidegger/*digger*. As such, Oswald's reading of Heidegger and her recourse to a language of 'things' proceeds in the opposite direction to recent developments in so-called 'thing theory', in which Bill Brown identifies in the need to encounter things the desire for 'something concrete that relieves us from necessary abstraction'.¹⁸ Though Oswald shares this desire to eliminate 'abstraction', the aim, for her, is not one of relief, and for her thingness is not a kind of abstraction; rather, her poetry highlights the disquieting effect of encountering things on their own terms. According to Brown, we only 'begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us'.¹⁹ Oswald's emphasis, on the other hand – or, more appropriately, in her hands – is different; for her, it is only when we work *with* objects (as in tools) that we begin to know the world and the nature of our relationship with it, and the more 'unveiledly' both the tool and the world is encountered. Such a realisation underpins Oswald's poetry, but only in the sense that it is a perspective that is earned through work and especially that kind of habitual work which is characteristic of gardening or farming; for as Oswald states, as with Heidegger's 'hammer-thing', any tool 'needs to be picked up and put down and then picked up again over a period of time, according to what needs doing'.²⁰

In *Earth and Reveries of Will*, Gaston Bachelard comments on the creative and imaginative potential of working with tools:

The resistant world lifts us out of our static reality, beyond ourselves, initiating us into the mysteries of energy. Henceforth we are *awakened* beings. Hammer or

¹⁷ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 40: see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 98.

¹⁸ Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', in *Things*, ed. by Bill Brown (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 1-22, (p 1): see also Bill Brown, *The Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Neither is Oswald's approach that of William Carlos Williams in his famous adage 'no ideas but in things', for in the context of her work it would be more accurate to say: 'no ideas but things'. For a comparative study of Oswald and Williams see Tom Bristow, "'Contracted to an eye-quiet world": Sonic Census or Poetics of Place in Alice Oswald', *Symbiosis*, 10.2 (October 2006), 167-85.

¹⁹ Brown, 'Thing Theory', p. 4.

²⁰ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 40.

trowel in hand, we no longer stand alone—we have an adversary, something to accomplish [emphasis in original].²¹

For Bachelard, as for Oswald, it is only when we encounter the recalcitrance of the material world that we are ‘*awakened*’. Bachelard’s account may be adversarial, even violent, but it is consistent with Oswald’s view of the relationship between the worker and the world.²²

Although neither Bachelard nor Oswald make the connection themselves, their advocacy of tool-use resembles that of Virgil’s *Georgics*. For Richard F. Thomas, the difference between the pastoral and the georgic, in Virgilian terms, is that the georgic does not allow for nostalgia (loathed by Oswald), but rather ‘plays itself out in the context of the need for toil and toil as a form of warfare against resistant nature’.²³ Georgic toil may be configured as a form of warfare but it does not advocate the subjugation or the abuse of the natural world. Instead, it reminds us that survival, for all living beings, is a struggle, and that to shape or rework any natural environment into a human design (or a poem) requires a great deal of effort.

If there is a message at the heart of Oswald’s early poetry, it is that in order to become ‘*awakened*’, as Bachelard puts it, what is required is more than just thoughts: ‘because we’re not just here to think about literature’, she says in her Hughes lecture, ‘we’re here to try to wake up.’²⁴ Poetry, for Oswald, is another form of work – both the writing of it and the reading of it. Language must be put under stress if the vagaries of abstraction are to be avoided, and this is a charge that any close examination of Oswald’s poetry must take on board. In this regard, the comparison made by Oswald between manual and mental labour is more than an analogy and goes to the heart of her working methods. Consequently, it is only when a person (or a poem) becomes ‘bodily implicated in the ground’s world, thought and

²¹ Bachelard, p. 14.

²² In an interview with Kate Kellaway, for instance, she recalls how the experience of gardening was ‘like meeting an opponent’: see Kate Kellaway, ‘Into the woods’, *Observer*, 19 June 2005 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/-jun/19/poetry.features?INTCMP=SRCH>> [accessed 12 June 2012].

²³ Thomas, ‘The *Georgics* of Resistance’, p. 140.

²⁴ Oswald, ‘Wild Things’.

earth continually passing through each other' that we are lifted out of 'our static reality'.²⁵

This chapter looks to the *Georgics* as a precedent for Oswald's efforts to go beyond words. In order to fully appreciate the georgic qualities of her work, however, another key influence must first be accounted for: that of the Scottish poet, artist, and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay.

The 'armoured farm'

Oswald repeatedly references Homer and Hughes as major influences, but the figure she initially cites as having an impact upon her approach is the lesser known Finlay. 'Language has to balance,' she proclaims, 'it has physical properties. I first recognised this in the sculpture poems of Ian Hamilton Finlay, when I was being interviewed (in a rowing boat) to be his gardener.'²⁶ Putting aside this tantalising mention of a rowboat interview, Oswald's reference to Finlay prompts a series of useful questions: for instance, how can language balance? Why is this important? How does it have physical properties? And – importantly – what else did Oswald come to recognise in the work of Finlay? The answers to these questions can help to shed light on Oswald's work, especially when it comes to her early poems, when her encounter with Finlay was still fresh in her mind. If Finlay proved to be the catalyst for a number of crucial lessons for Oswald, so too does his influence provide a key to her engagement with the georgic.

Despite Oswald's claim of influence, her connection with Finlay remains on the whole overlooked.²⁷ A reason for this may be the difference in the approaches of the two poets. Finlay, the self-titled 'AVANT-GARDener', saw little value in Hughes's work and

²⁵ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 40.

²⁶ Alice Oswald, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile', in *Poets in their Own Words*, p. 207.

²⁷ For mentions of Finlay's influence on Oswald see Pinard, p. 31; Peter Howarth, "'Water's Soliloquy': Soundscape and Environment in Alice Oswald's *Dart*", in *Poetry & Geography: Place and Space in Post-War Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 190-203, (p. 200); and Solnick, p. 28.

instead looked back to the pastoral tradition for inspiration.²⁸ The sum of his own work is tragic, Finlay claimed, but is centred above all on the pastoral, especially the writing of Virgil.²⁹ Oswald is far less keen to claim a debt to the pastoral tradition: ‘I can’t help loving the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* and the *Idylls*,’ she says to Cox, ‘but they’re not quite enough’.³⁰ However, though Oswald may seek to define her own work against the pastoral, she remains in two minds about the distinction: ‘it annoys me that I just love them’, she adds, ‘because in theory I don’t’.³¹ Oswald may not engage with Virgil ‘in theory’, instead grouping his *Georgics* alongside his *Eclogues* and Theocritus’s *Idylls* in a tradition she firmly rejects, but once Finlay’s influence has been taken into account it soon becomes apparent that in practice her relationship with the *Georgics* in particular has its own profound complexities.

Finlay emerged out of the international *avant-garde* scene in the 1960s as a pioneer and leading practitioner of concrete poetry, among such figures as Eugene Gomringer (on mainland Europe), Haroldo de Campos, Augusto de Campos, and Décio Pignatari (in Brazil), and the Scottish poet Edwin Morgan. He is also renowned for his work as an artist and sculptor, his collaborations with both artists and sculptors, and his role as the founder and publisher of Wild Hawthorn Press and the poetry magazine *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse* (1962-1967). Finlay had spent time as a shepherd on the Isle of Orkney before turning his hand to writing: mostly poems, plays, and short stories. As his style became increasingly spare over the years, he took to making poems in three-dimensions, initially as postcards and posters, then eventually as stone carvings, neon lights, and even toys. With the simultaneous expansion and compression of Finlay’s artistic output, his historical and cultural reference points came to reflect an esoteric and uncompromising approach. He consistently looked back to Ancient Greece and Rome for philosophical and aesthetic precedents, but he also

²⁸ For Finlay’s disparagement of Hughes see Ian Hamilton Finlay, ‘Letter to Ernst Jandl, 1967’, *A Model of Order: Selected Letters on Poetry and Making*, ed. by Thomas A. Clark (Glasgow: Wax366, 2009), p. 42.

²⁹ Finlay, cited in Sue Innes, ‘Man of Sparta’, in *Wood Notes Wild: Essays on the Poetry and Art of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, ed. by Alec Finlay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995), pp. 9-15 (p. 12).

³⁰ Oswald, cited in Cox.

³¹ *Ibid.*

admired the eighteenth-century pioneers of English landscape gardening (in particular William Shenstone) and, controversially, the thinkers of revolutionary France (especially the writings of Louis Antoine de Saint-Just). Even more controversial was Finlay's recourse to military tropes and especially his adoption of Third Reich iconography, giving rise, in some cases, to extreme and hostile receptions of his work.³²

With all this accounted for, Finlay's (now almost entirely positive) legacy is to a large degree defined by his work as a gardener at his garden at Stonypath in southern Scotland. In the spirit of Finlay's integrity as an artist, the garden came to be known as Little Sparta (in opposition to Edinburgh's 'Athens of the north') – in one sense a reflection of his predisposition to make classical parallels, but in another a testament to his disputes with the Scottish Arts Council and the Strathclyde Region regarding the taxable status of his artworks.³³ From the mid-1960s onwards, the poet collaborated with his wife Sue Finlay and various artists to create a garden in which poetry, classical inscription, and sculpture were integrated into its design. Sundials, a pyramid, benches, ponds, watering cans, gates, stiles, herms, beehives, brick paths, boats, stone walls – such features, all embedded in the

³² Finlay's most controversial work took the form of *Ossso* (1987), a collaboration with Nicholas Sloan, which when exhibited in Paris in 1987 prompted an outcry from the French media. The piece consisted of three large rough-hewn marble slabs, the first being blank, the second bearing the form of the insignia of the Waffen SS, and the third repeating the second but with the edition of two letter 'o's spelling out the Italian word for 'bone'. The controversy surrounding the exhibition of the piece led to the French Government withdrawing a commission for Finlay to design a garden at Versailles to mark the bicentennial of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*; for a reproduction of this work see Yves Abrioux, *Ian Hamilton Finlay: A Visual Primer*, 2nd edn (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), p. 298.

³³ The 'Little Spartan Wars', as Finlay came to refer to them, arose out of a disagreement with the Scottish Arts Council about the cancellation of an exhibition in 1978 and came to a head regarding the financial status of a small agricultural building at Stonypath, which, having previously been a gallery space, was in 1980 converted by Finlay into a Temple to the Greek god Apollo. Strathclyde Council refused to accept this change in the building's status and therefore denied Finlay the rates exemption for the artworks contained within applicable by law to religious buildings. The 'Wars' led to a number of skirmishes involving the sheriff officer for the Strathclyde Region and a group who were supportive of Finlay known as the 'Saint-Just Vigilantes'. The first of these, when the sheriff's attempt to seize the artworks was successfully resisted, is now commemorated at the entrance to Finlay's garden in the form of a 'Monument to the First Battle of Little Sparta' (1984), a collaboration with Andrew Townsend and John Andrew consisting of a brick structure with a bronze plaque reading: 'FLUTE, BEGIN WITH ME ARCADIAN NOTES | VIRGIL, ECLOGUE VIII', accompanied by a relief, in bronze, of a machine gun; for a reproduction see Jessie Sheeler, *Little Sparta: A Guide to the Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2015), p. 3 (photographs by Robin Gillanders). Unless stated otherwise, all references to reproductions of Finlay's Little Sparta artworks are from this edition.



Figures 5.1 and 5.2. Ian Hamilton Finlay and Richard Phetham, *Virgil*, 1999, thirty-eight inscribed bricks, Little Sparta, Scotland (photograph taken by the author, 2017).

landscape, and many of them bearing inscriptions, reflect Finlay's unmistakably provocative wordplay and eye for juxtaposition.

To provide a salient example of the garden's forms and themes, in the English Parkland, one of the final areas of the garden to be completed, there are a number of homages to Virgil, among them a bench emblazoned with an extract from Eclogue VII, lines 61-64:

THE POPLAR IS MOST DEAR TO HERCULES,
THE VINE TO BACCUS, THE MYRTLE TO
LOVELY VENUS, HIS LAURELS TO PHOEBUS,
PHYLLIS LOVES THE HAZELS.³⁴

Close by, a brick path, each brick inscribed with 'Virgil', leads a short way to the base of a beech tree (Figures 5.1 and 5.2); and further down the garden lies a drystone sheepfold, its gate bearing the term 'Eclogue' in honour of the artist and translator of Virgil's *Eclogues* Samuel Palmer (1805-1881). On its interior walls are the words: 'FOLDING | THE LAST | SHEEP'.³⁵ To complicate things further, these pieces lie within sight of a bronze

³⁴ Ian Hamilton Finlay and Caroline Webb, *The Poplar is Most Dear to Hercules*, 2002, bench, inscribed, slate, Little Sparta, Scotland: see Sheeler, p. 173.

³⁵ Ian Hamilton Finlay and Caroline Webb, *Eclogue: Folding the Last Sheep*, 1998, dry-stone walls, with slate plaques, wooden gate: see Sheeler, p. 151. Finlay's sheepfold was inspired by a card in the shape of a sheepfold made by the poet Thomas A. Clark in 1973: see Thomas A. Clark, 'Eclogue', *Thomas A. Clark*,

wheelbarrow, fixed securely to the ground and accompanied by a plaque with the inscription: ‘W. Shenstone 1714-63’ (Figure 5.3). For the art historian Stephen Bann – one of Finlay’s most long-standing advocates – Shenstone’s *ferme ornée* (‘ornamental farm’) at The Leasowes in Shropshire is a precursor to Finlay’s garden at Little Sparta, in that it was the garden of a poet and that poetry was a part of its overall effect (Stonypath was also originally a farm and farmhouse).³⁶ So much depends upon the wheelbarrow: in Finlay’s own English Parkland, the Virgilian mode evoked throughout is the pastoral; and yet, in the monument to Shenstone, Finlay elevates a piece of gardening equipment to the status of art, hinting that his theme is also the working world of the georgic.³⁷

Elsewhere in the English Parkland, there lie two stone slabs bearing direct quotations from the *Georgics* IV in their original Latin (ll. 141-46):

ILLE TILIAE ATQUE UBERRIMA PINUS
 QUOTQUE IN FLORE NOVO POMIS SE FERTILIS ARBOS
 INDUERAT, TOTIDEM AUTUMNO MATURA TENEBAT.

ILLE ETIAM SERAS IN VERSUM DISTULIT ULMOS
 EDURAMQUE PIRUM ET SPINOS IAM PRUNA FERENTES
 IAMQUE MINISTRANTEM PLATANUM POTANTIBUS UMBRAS.

[He had lime trees and a most luxuriant pine and all the fruits his bountiful tree took on at its first blooming it kept to its ripening in autumn. He even transplanted well-grown elm trees in order and pears still hard and thorns with growing sloes and planes already giving shade as thirsts were slaked.]³⁸

Here, the tree varieties of Eclogue VII – the beech, the poplar, and the laurel – are accompanied by fruiting trees and those that offer shade to working gardeners. These lines

<<http://thomasaclarkblog.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/eclogue.html>> [accessed 15 May 2018]. For the presence of Samuel Palmer’s pastoral in Finlay’s and Clark’s work and that of related poets see Ross Hair, *Avant-Folk: Small Press Poetry Networks from 1950 to the Present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 171-200.

³⁶ Stephen Bann, ‘A Description of Stonypath’, *Journal of Garden History* 1.2 (1981), 113-144; repr. *A Description of Stonypath* (Bradford: Friends of Stonypath Garden, 1981), p. 113. Bann’s title is in homage to Robert Dodsley’s ‘A Description of the Leasowes’ (1765) which contributed towards Shenstone’s popularity and renown.

³⁷ For more on the eighteenth-century georgic and the origins of the *ferme ornée* see Laura B. Sayre, ‘Locating the Georgic: From the Ferme Ornée to the Model Farm’, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 22.3 (2002), 167-92.

³⁸ Ian Hamilton Finlay and Peter Coates, *Illi Tiliae Atque Uberrima Pinus*, 1997, two inscribed tablets, Caithness stone, each one within stone sets and a grove (translation by Sheeler): see Sheeler, pp. 163-64.

are taken from a brief passage on gardens in Virgil's poem and relate to story of 'the old man of Tarentum' whose subsistence on a small patch of land provides for Virgil an ideal for all gardeners. Though the figure is related to the pastoral tradition, as Richard F. Thomas points out:

the old man is at the same time distinct from that tradition, modified and accommodated as he now is to the realities of a small-scale, private georgic (i.e., horticultural) existence. Pure pastoral is no longer an option for Virgil in the *Georgics*.³⁹

Neither, it would seem, was it an option for Finlay. Virgil may not have allowed much room for the praise of gardens in the *Georgics*, leaving this task to future writers, but the gap left by his omission does its own work.⁴⁰ 'Virgil's *idea* of a "gap" is the point', argues John Henderson, 'he is telling us to think where the garden *belongs* on the farm' (emphasis in



Figure 5.3. Ian Hamilton Finlay, Nicholas Sloan, and Andrew Daish, *W. Shenstone 1714-63*, 1998, wheelbarrow, bronze, with inscribed plaque, Little Sparta, Scotland (photograph taken by the author, 2017).

³⁹ Richard F. Thomas, 'The Old Man at Tarentum Revisited: Memory, Reference and Genre in Virg., Georg. 4, 116-48', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, 29 (1992), 35-70 (p. 66).

⁴⁰ See Book IV. 147-48: 'Let this memory stand for all I might say of gardens; | The saying must wait for others, while I hasten on', as translated by Robert Wells, 'Virgil, *The Georgics*', *Collected Poems and Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2009), pp. 153-207 (p. 202).

original).⁴¹ So too does Finlay, claims Victoria Pagan, when she states that Finlay makes concrete Virgil's emphasis on the 'separateness' of gardens.⁴² According to the georgic principles of Virgil and Finlay, the idea of the garden is both contained within and exists apart from the realities of the farm; and as if to emphasis the point, close to the georgic inscriptions in Finlay's English Parkland are three white painted Beehives, each bearing the name of an actual fishing boat, honouring the risk taken by bees and fishermen alike for the sake of harvests on farms, at sea, and in the semi-wild of the garden.⁴³

In Finlay's hands, the ornamental elements of Shenstone's *ferme ornée* take on the properties (in Finlay's own translation of the term) of an 'armoured farm'.⁴⁴ Finlay conceived his garden in opposition to what he saw as the morally corrupt elements of modern society. Crucially, in the context of Oswald's work, his garden also serves as a reminder of the warlike activity of gardening itself in that any farmer or gardener must arm themselves against nature. 'Certain gardens are described as retreats when really they are attacks,' states Finlay in one of his 'Detached Sentences on Gardening' (1980-1998), which are modelled on the work of Shenstone (and which are singled out for special praise by Oswald).⁴⁵ In a letter

⁴¹ John Henderson, *The Roman Book of Gardening* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 5.

⁴² Victoria Emma Pagán, 'The Afterlife of Little Sparta', in *'Disciples of Flora': Gardens in History and Culture*, ed. by Victoria Emma Pagán, Judith W. Page, and Brigitte Weltman-Aron (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), pp. 145-65 (p. 160).

⁴³ There are further references to the *Georgics* in an area of Little Sparta called the Wild Garden, though these are more playful: a stone post decorated with ivy bears an inscription from Book II: 'FORTUNAS ET ILLE DEOS QUI NOVIT AGRESTES' [Blessed too is he who knows the country gods] (l. 493) (Finlay and Peter Coates, 2000, Purbeck Ponfree limestone); and nearby, there is a stone slab bearing an inscription of a translation from the Book IV (ll. 54-55): '.....THEY LIGHTLY SKIM, | AND GENTLY SIP THE | DIMPLY RIVER'S BRIM' (Finlay and Annet Stirling, 1995, Slate): see Sheeler, pp. 100, 122. For more on the presence of the *Georgics* in the English Parkland and throughout Little Sparta see Pagán, pp. 155-162. It is also no mistake that the English Parkland is adjacent to the Kailyard area of Little Sparta, a kitchen garden where vegetables are grown, and which constitutes a homage to the Scottish vernacular 'kailyard school' of rural fiction.

⁴⁴ Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Two Translations', *Selections*, ed. by Alec Finlay (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2012), p. 191, originally published as a card for The Committee of Public Safety (Wild Hawthorn Press, 1983). As Alec Finlay explains in a note to the work in *Selections*, 'the addition of "The Committee of Public Safety" reflects the escalation of the dispute over the rating of the Garden Temple in the Little Spartan War' (p. 293).

⁴⁵ Ian Hamilton Finlay, 'Detached Sentences on Gardening', *Selections*, pp. 179-86 (p. 179): see William Shenstone, 'Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening', ed. by Stephen Bending and Andrew McRae, <<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~sdb2/unconnected.htm>> [accessed 18 Jan 2017]. See also Alice Oswald, 'Inside Ian Hamilton Finlay's Enchanting Garden Little Sparta', *Harper's Bazaar*, November 2013 <<http://www.harpersbazaar.co.uk/culture/culture-news/news/a34436/inside-ian-hamilton-finlays-enchanting-garden-little-sparta/>> [accessed 17 January 2017].

to Michael Schmidt in 1980, Finlay argues that ‘reality can only be put down in “detached sentences” (I borrow the phrase from Shenstone)—(he actually said Thoughts)—which acknowledge that they have spaces in between them’.⁴⁶ In fact, the original phrase was ‘Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening’ (1764), but Finlay’s reinterpretation provides a meeting point between Oswald’s interests and Shenstone’s. ‘Thoughts’ suggests a high-minded approach, but Finlay’s sentences are subversive and emphasise the ‘spaces’ in-between syntactical units.

Oswald first encountered Finlay in 1990, six years before the publication of her first collection. As she recounts in an article in 2013, she met with him after applying for a job as his gardener at Stonypath.⁴⁷ For the following seven years, Oswald and Finlay shared a correspondence. None of the letters informed Oswald if her application had been successful but served instead, as she puts it, as ‘a series of footnotes to his extraordinary garden’.⁴⁸ The experience of visiting Finlay’s Little Sparta was for Oswald one of ‘paradox’:

It’s an unsettling place, both protective and disruptive. One moment you move among the birch-trees where a set of pan pipes, half hidden in leaves, tells you: ‘When the wind blows/ venerate the sound’; the next moment you meet a stone tortoise on whose shell is written ‘panzer leader’. There’s a pool of reflected clouds, a broken column, a path of boat names; then suddenly gateposts topped with hand grenades leading to a huge decapitated head of apollo [sic]. A submarine’s conning tower sticks up out of the shallows of a very small lake. An ‘English Lane’, set between hedges, neither meanders nor leads anywhere.⁴⁹

Based on this description, it is easy to see how Finlay’s marriage of gardening, poetry, and sculpture had a profound impact on a gardener who was in the process of finding her voice as a poet. Oswald’s account evokes two ways of encountering the garden: as sound, in the case of the pan pipes, and, in the example of the tortoise, as sculpture – emphasising both the non-human music of the wind, and the destructive capacity of human nature. For Oswald, as for

⁴⁶ Finlay, ‘Letter to Michael Schmidt, 31 August 1980’, *A Model of Order*, ed. by Clark, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Oswald, ‘Inside Ian Hamilton Finlay’s Enchanting Garden Little Sparta’.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* The English Parkland area of the Little Sparta would not have been completed when Oswald visited in 1990. However, her mention of Finlay’s ‘Huff Lane’, a central feature of the English Parkland and not installed until 1999, suggests that she has returned there since it was finished.

Finlay, gardens are not places of retreat but are spaces in which to examine the extremes and the limits of the human. Oswald may present her own work as a foil to the pastoral tradition, positioning herself in opposition to eighteenth-century perspectives on the land, but through her exposure to Finlay's work the more disruptive elements of these traditions, both the classical and the modern, infiltrate the structures and penetrate the surfaces of her poems.

Oswald did not only inherit the embattled outlook of the gardener-poet from Finlay; she also learnt from him in terms of poetic technique. As she states above, she attributes her notion of 'language as a physical object' to her visit to Finlay's garden at Stonypath. In her mind, there is a connection between Finlay's experiments in concrete poetry and Homer's oral poetry, the 'actuality' of which for her is 'almost sculptural'.⁵⁰ When she first encountered Homer, she recounts, 'words felt like things'; the same is true, she adds, in the case of concrete poetry.⁵¹ Likewise, Finlay preferred to think of his experiments in concrete poetry as 'thingpoems'.⁵² One way of countering the abstract, for Oswald as for Finlay, is to perceive words as things. Yet unlike Finlay, who rendered poems in the form of objects, Oswald is not strictly a 'concrete' poet (in her early work at least). Her works for the most part are standard publications, and the poems in her first collection in particular are mostly formally conventional.⁵³ Nonetheless, sound and sculpture feature heavily in Oswald's poems both in terms of metaphor and versification. Oswald's concern, related to Finlay's minimalism, is to avoid abstraction in her language at all costs, and by doing so provide a

⁵⁰ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 44; Oswald, cited in Cox.

⁵¹ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 44.

⁵² Finlay, 'Letter to Gael Turnbull, 12 March 1963', *A Model of Order*, ed. by Clark, p. 15. In addition to the work of other concrete poets, a precedent for Finlay's – and Oswald's – idea of 'thingpoems' is the 'dinggedichte' (German for 'thing-poems') of Rainer Maria Rilke in his *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*) (1907/08), in particular when everyday objects or natural forms are taken from everyday life and rendered as art, as in 'Blaue Hortensie' ('Blue Hydrangea'), 'Römische Fontäne' ('Roman Fountain'), 'Das Karussell' ('The Merry-G-Round'), and 'Rosa Hortensie' ('Pink Hydrangia'). Oswald anthologises Rilke's 'The Eighth Elegy' in *The Thunder Mutters* (pp. 53-55). The term 'dinggedichte' was coined by K. Oppert in 1926 in an article in *DVLG* 4 (1926). Further precedents can be found in imagism (Ezra Pound, H. D.), and in the United States in objectivism (William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky).

⁵³ Oswald has more recently branched out into unconventional methods of publishing her poems in the manner of Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press in her collaborations with Kevin Mount and The Letter Press: see <<http://www.theletterpress.org>> [accessed 23 June 2018].

tangible sense of the physicality of manual work. This she achieves primarily by way of rhythm.

Thingpoems

A significant number of the poems in *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* centre on the activity of gardening – or, more accurately, on the pauses between phases of that activity. Take, for instance, the closing lines of ‘Pruning in Frost’:

I can imagine
Pain, turned heron,
could fly off slowly in a creak of wings.

And I’d be staring, like one of those
cold-holy and granite kings,
getting carved into this effigy of orchard.
(*TGSS*, p. 3)

There are echoes of Finlay’s garden forms in the Ovidian metamorphosis of the allegorical ‘Pain’, which the speaker imagines transfigured into a heron.⁵⁴ Likewise, the speaker is subject to another transformation, proceeding to imagine herself ‘getting carved into this effigy of orchard’. If ‘Pruning in Frost’ is a poem which bears traces of the influence of both Hughes and Finlay, then Oswald’s work represents the meeting point between the georgic extremes of these two very different poets. Oswald’s early poetry, like Hughes’s, is for the most part written in conventional syntax; but, like Finlay’s, it is pared down to its essential elements. Indeed, ‘Pruning in Frost’ is itself carefully pruned, enabling Oswald to cultivate gaps and pauses in-between – and even in the middle of – her lines. ‘Poetry is only there to frame the silence’, she states to Kellaway, and in ‘Pruning in Frost’ these gaps of ‘silence’ combine to bring the poem almost to a standstill, manipulating the reading voice (for

⁵⁴ There are a number of works in Finlay’s *Little Sparta* that are inspired by Ovid *Metamorphoses*: see Sheeler, pp. 21-3, 72, 100.

Oswald's poetry was written to be read aloud) into irregular shapes.⁵⁵ The poem is as much about sculpting an experience for the *listener* as it is about shaping organic matter.

Other poems in *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* feature gardeners having to abandon their work due to weather conditions ('A Greyhound in the Evening after a Long Day of Rain', 'The Apple Shed') or narrate how 'they lamented the weather' ('Gardeners at the Resurrection') (*TGSS*, pp. 4-5, 37, 35). The stop and start rhythms of habitual work infiltrate the poems on both a prosodic and a syntactical level: in 'The Gardeners in the Shed', for example, the 'tunes of clinking spades begin and stop', with the use of tools providing a percussive equivalent to the interruptions of the elements (*TGSS*, p. 36).

If gardeners must ceaselessly adjust to the unpredictability of the climate, then Oswald makes an effort to do the same in her writing. In 'The Glass House', her speaker pauses in her work to appreciate the architecture and atmosphere of her surroundings:

The glass house is a hole in the rain,
the sun's chapel,
a bell for the wind.

Cucumbers, full of themselves,
the long green lungs of that still air,

image the fruits of staying put,
like water beetles in woodland puddles
and hoofprints.

And I
am a hole in the glass house,
taking my time between the rows.

The leaves, the yellow blooms, the pots
vanish through a loop of thoughts.
(*TGSS*, p. 6)

Like many of the artworks in Finlay's *Little Sparta*, the glass house is both a sculpture and an acoustic device. For the speaker, it is a church in which the sounds of wind can be venerated,

⁵⁵ Oswald, cited in Kellaway; see also Thacker, pp. 110-14.

adding a religious aspect to Oswald's poetry, though not in any conventional sense.⁵⁶ The spirituality of the poem, combined with its simple syntax, also recalls the work of R. S. Thomas, in particular his poem 'The Garden': 'It is a gesture against the wild [...] Answering to their names | Out of the soil the buds come.'⁵⁷ Another precedent can be found in Norman MacCaig's 'Summer Farm', both in the stillness of the imagery – 'Green as glass | The water in the horse-trough shines' – and in the poet's 'metaphysic hand': 'I lie, not thinking [...] Lift the farm like a lid and see | Farm within farm, and in the centre, me.'⁵⁸

Oswald's poem manages to contain these allusions while at the same time, like Thomas's and MacCaig's poems, maintaining that air of something written down in a moment of pause between manual tasks:

Then far off
comes the cluck-sound of this green can
dipping and spilling . . .
and dipping again.

(TGSS, p. 6)

Just as Oswald argues that 'language has to balance', in 'The Glass House' she strikes a careful balance herself between the monotony of labour and the more disquieting effects of gardening. The structure on which the poem is based is itself paradoxical – to borrow Oswald's description of Finlay's garden – in that it is both 'protective and disruptive': it may facilitate a kind of Heideggerian dwelling but being made of glass it also emphasises the thinness and the transparency of the barrier that separates the speaker from the outside world, thus emphasising the fragility of any sense of being at home within it.

⁵⁶ In her introduction to *The Thing in Gap-Stone Stile* for the Poetry Book Society, Oswald clarifies her position as a Christian in a manner which could be interpreted as a georgic of faith: 'On the subject of God, I don't like the facile distinction between belief and non-belief. Those who don't believe are normally talking about a god they've invented; and for the rest of us, it doesn't feel like a question of belief, more like a slow process of experiencing what the terms really mean' (Oswald, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile', in *Poets in their Own Words*, pp. 207-06).

⁵⁷ R. S. Thomas, 'The Garden', *Collected Poems, 1945-1990* (London: Phoenix, 1995, repr. 1998), p. 132.

⁵⁸ Norman MacCaig, 'Summer farm', *The Poems of Norman MacCaig*, ed. by Ewen MacCaig (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2005), p. 34. Oswald anthologises both Thomas and MacCaig in *The Thunder Mutters* (pp. 10, 64).

In *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*, the poems are for the most part split between those that adhere to formal conventions on the one hand and free-verse experimentation on the other. In order to complicate these compositions, however, Oswald turns her attention to content as well as form; while the poems may appear conventional, the arrangement of the disparate objects they describe is often more haphazard. The opening lines of one of three ‘Sea Sonnets’, for example, read:

A field, a sea-flower, three stones, a stile.
Not one thing close to another
throughout air.

(*TGSS*, p. 21)

As it stands, Oswald almost always prefers paratactic structures to hypotactic, hierarchical syntax, thus placing each word or thing on an equal footing with the next. In her ‘Sea Sonnet’, the ‘sea-flower’ suggests ornamentation and yet retains a sense of wildness. The three stones picked out by the speaker are also suggestive of the question of human and non-human agency: why mention these three stones in particular? Who placed them there? Is their arrangement accidental or have they been laid out on purpose by the speaker or a stranger? In the previous poem, also entitled ‘Sea Sonnet’, the sea is described as ‘a cairn of rain’ (*TGSS*, p. 20). Cairns are key structures for Oswald, as they exemplify improvised sculptures arranged by anonymous composers in the landscape without the aid of any adhesive or cement. The three stones in ‘Sea Sonnet’ may not in themselves be enough to comprise a cairn but their togetherness, as well as their distinctness, suggests that they have nonetheless been arranged according to a certain aesthetic principle either by human or by natural design.

The image of the stile is another important structure in Oswald’s poetry, especially in her first collection. In its title poem ‘The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile’, the speaker is presented as a walker and not a worker; nonetheless, the poem remains sensitive to the hard work of making a living in the landscape:

I never absolutely told
the curl-horned cows to line up their gaze
but it happened, so I let it be.

And Annual Meadow Grass, quite of her own accord,
between the dry-stone spread out emerald.

(I was delighted by her initiative
and praised the dry-stone for being contrary.)
(*TGSS*, p. 32)

In this passage, there is a sense of serendipity; the cows, the grass, and the stones appear to have arranged themselves into stanzas and lines. Yet this is undeniably a man-made landscape and separating its fields are walls standing as a testament to the laborious task of



Figure 5.4. Richard Long, *Boyhood Line*, 2015, chalk, Bristol (photograph taken by the author, 2015).

maintaining and utilising nature. The poem's form reflects this counter-balancing act: ostensibly it is written in free verse, yet it is also made up of discreet if varying stanzas with offbeat moments of rhyme and half-rhyme, as though poised somewhere between the accidental and the preconceived. The 'thing' is thus an instance, like a cairn, of an improvised composition. Oswald's employment of prosopopoeia, elevating the status of the grass itself to landscaper – even deity – lifts a feature of the landscape out of the abstract and

acknowledges its agency. Furthermore, the use of the word 'accord' suggests the lack of an external influence (the human) but it also contains within it the concept of harmony. By giving credit to the 'initiative' of the environment, the poet shows that any effort exerted to compose the landscape must be made in collaboration with it – or even against it. The speaker praises the dry-stone for being 'contrary': it is an antagonistic, even hostile, obstacle to their progress.

As in the case of Finlay's poem-sculptures, one of the side-effects of Oswald's poems is that naturally formed or man-made improvised structures are elevated to the status of art. The stone forms she emulates such as cairns and walls throughout *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* bring to mind the work of contemporary artists Andy Goldsworthy and Richard Long, who also use natural and found materials to make their mark upon the land, often constructing their work according to dry-stone principles (Figures 5.4 and 5.5). Oswald's poem 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile' bears a resemblance to the work of Long in particular (an artist who, like Oswald, is based in the South West) in that it describes a walk and it appears to be, as Long puts it in the case of his work, 'words after the fact'.⁵⁹ Long primarily makes his art by walking – or, more accurately, his art *is* walking – often in places

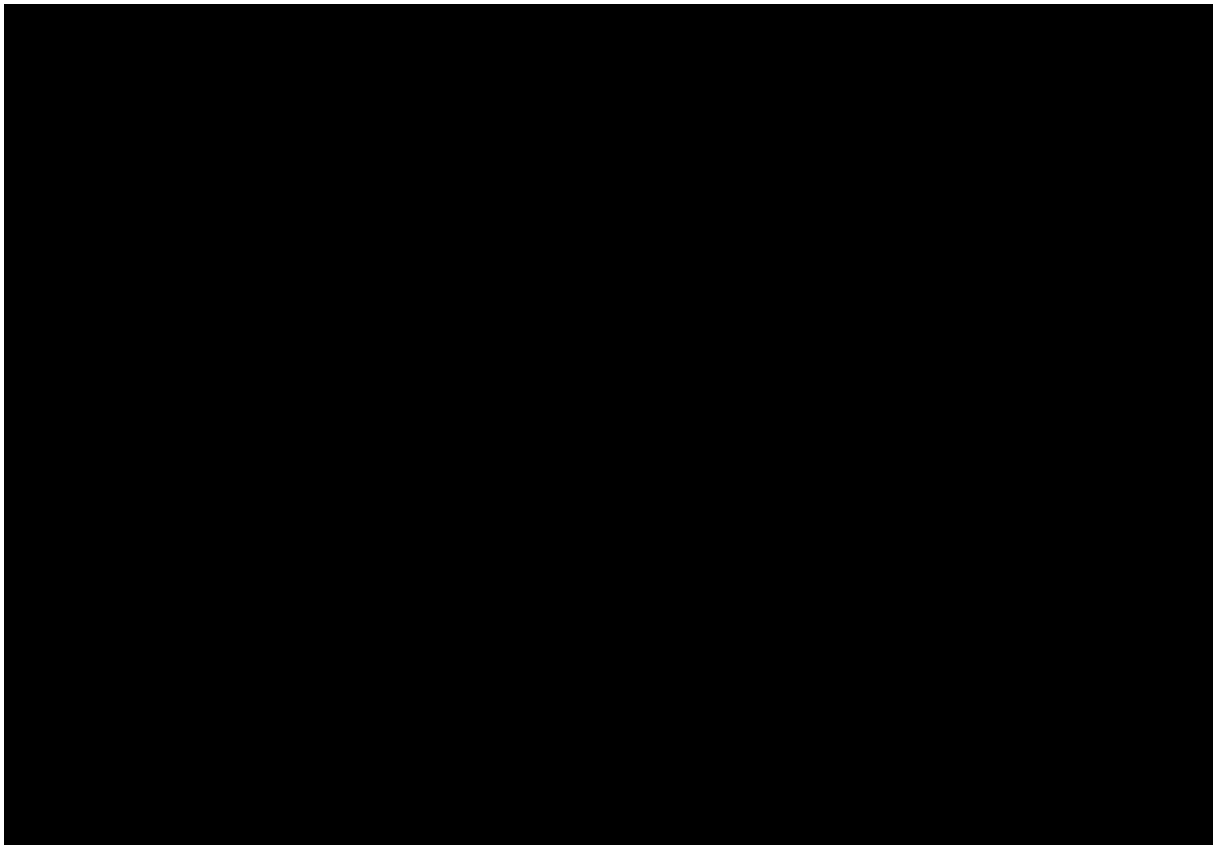


Figure 5.5. Andy Goldsworthy, *Balanced Rocks*, 1978, Morecambe Bay, Lancashire, reproduction from Andy Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth: Sculpture 1976-1990* (1990), ed. by Terry Friedman and Andy Goldsworthy (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), p. 10.

⁵⁹ Richard Long, 'Five, six, pick up sticks | Seven, eight, lay them straight' (London: Anthony d'Offay, 1980), repr. in *Selected Statements & Interviews*, ed. by Ben Tufnell (London: Haunch of Venison, 2007), pp. 15-21 (p. 21).

that are relatively unpopulated and inaccessible, from Dartmoor to the Himalayas. In some cases, a photograph will document the trace of a walk, as in ‘A Line Made By Walking’ (England, 1967); in others, it will be a diagram and/or text arranged typographically on the page much like a concrete poem, as in ‘Two Walks’ (Dartmoor, 1972).⁶⁰ ‘A good work is the right thing in the right place at the right time. A crossing place,’ declares Long in a series of statements made about his practice in 1980 (which bear an uncanny resemblance to Finlay’s ‘Detached Sentences’, published the same year).⁶¹ Though ‘The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile’ stands on its own as a conventional poem, it could also be read as a record of a specific walk or a second-hand account of a work of land art.

As a foundational structure in Oswald’s work, the dry-stone stile can itself be thought of as a kind of sculpture. Such stiles can be ornamental but often they are formed according to more practical, working, and improvised principles, merely taking the form of a gap. The setting of ‘The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile’ may be aesthetically ornamental (‘emerald’) but it is also a working landscape, its dry-stone walls forming a barrier between fields, an impasse for cattle as well as the walker/speaker. The poem concludes with the image of a figure between two fields:

And I certainly intended
anyone to be almost
abstracted on a gap-stone between fields.
(*TGSS*, p. 32)

The qualification in the language here echoes a sentiment expressed earlier in the poem: ‘I certainly intended | anyone to be almost | abstracted’ sounds somewhat like ‘I never absolutely told’. The effect in both cases is one of ambiguity: to what extent was anything intended? In these closing lines, the ‘I’ of the speaker is abstracted to the point that it could indeed be anyone, with this indeterminate position contributing to a decentring of the self.

⁶⁰ For reproductions of these works see Richard Long, *Walking in Circles* (New York: George Braziller, 1991), pp. 26, 28. I return to the affinities between Long’s work and Oswald’s in chapter VI (p. 258 n, 678).

⁶¹ Long, ‘Five, six, pick up sticks’, p. 19.

Indeed, if the grass has been personified, then by the end of the poem the person has likewise been abstracted. Yet, as more qualifications follow, they remain ‘almost | abstracted’, with the use of enjambment further emphasising their paradoxical position.

Such was the sensation Oswald experienced in Finlay’s garden. In the poem ‘Mountains’, which features a central quatrain wedged between two larger blocks of words, Oswald explores such possibilities and paradoxes further:

Look through a holey stone. Now put it down.
Something is twice as different. Something gone
accumulates a queerness. Be alone.
Something is side by side with anyone.
(*TGSS*, p. 34)

‘Something,’ ‘anyone’ – it is almost as if the poem is becoming abstract to the point of not meaning anything. Yet these are also words for unnameable things and express the limits as well as the distorting capacity of language. The ‘holey stone’ is an equivalent to the ‘gap-stone’ of the title poem and the collection as whole, and the act of picking it up and putting it down again enacts the careful and considered physical work of the manual labourer – both the stonewaller and the gardener but also the poet and sculptor.⁶² Once the stone has been placed (either by accident or on purpose) it is seen in an entirely new aesthetic context. The agent of this placement is also changed by the process; the language of the speaker goes from the aesthete-like register of ‘accumulates a queerness’ to the straightforwardly simple ‘Be alone’ in a single line. A sequence of internal and near-rhymes articulates a process of metamorphosis from singular to plural, from self-knowledge to anonymity: ‘stone’, ‘down’, ‘gone’, ‘alone’, ‘anyone’. Oswald’s compositions may appear simple at first glance, but their effect is cumulative. Indeed, the placing of one thing upon or ‘side by side’ with another is in each case unsettling.

⁶² For more on Oswald’s ‘dry stone style’ and the figure of the stonewaller in her work, see Thacker, and Middleton, pp. 161-64.

The Idea of a Mobile Poem

In her lyric collections, Oswald takes Finlay's notion of poetry as sculpture and applies it to her versification: 'I build my poems out of discreet blocks of sound and grammar with huge gaps in between them,' she explains in an essay about poetry and gardening.⁶³ Elsewhere, she says of her poems in *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* that she used a 'dry-stone method' to construct them.⁶⁴ Oswald sources her dry-stone style not only from Finlay but Homer. She observes that an 'oral poet – and Homer was one (or several) – works in chorus with his predecessors, learning from them a repertoire of rhythmical phrases that enable him to compose spontaneously in metre'.⁶⁵ Like any dry-stone structure, oral poetry is composed from pre-existing verbal material which is newly assembled rather than created from scratch by an individual. The oral poet must work 'in chorus' with the polished and shaped 'rhythmical phrases' of a long history of composition. The resulting form is, in Oswald's words, 'like a cairn', a dry-stone monument to the oral tradition.⁶⁶

Writing about *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* in 1996, Oswald explains how, 'up to now, I've been using a dry-stone method: finding discreet blocks of words and jamming them together to make something unshakable. But I need something more baroque and growing, like a hawthorn.'⁶⁷ *Woods etc.* is the realisation of this change in approach. Oswald did not entirely abandon her method of wedging together acoustic units (she elaborates on the technique in *Memorial*, for example); nonetheless, there is a shift that occurs after the publication of *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* that heralds a more flexible approach on the part of the poet. Given Oswald's claim that she builds her poems out of 'blocks', any reader (or listener, for that matter) may be forgiven for interpreting the results as static and 'unshakeable'. In fact, even in her earlier works, the opposite is true; the poems of her first

⁶³ Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain', p. 41.

⁶⁴ Oswald, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile', in *Poets in their Own Words*, p. 208.

⁶⁵ Alice Oswald, 'The Unbearable Brightness of Speaking', *New Statesman*, 17 October 2011 <available at, <http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2011/10/homer-essay-iliad-poetry-poem>> [accessed 5 May 2017].

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Oswald, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile', in *Poets in their Own Words*, p. 208.

collection themselves feature gaps through which outside forces can penetrate and complicate each line. In *Woods etc.*, Oswald widens these gaps and, in the process, gives rise to looser, semi-mobile poems.

There is an analogy to be drawn between making poems and forming barriers in a garden or between fields, in that poems must be flexible as well as substantial. A cursory glance at instances of poems about dry-stone walls confirms this. Robert Frost's 'Mending Wall' contains the riddling proposition: 'Something there is that doesn't love a wall, | That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, | And spills the upper boulders in the sun.'⁶⁸

Likewise, the Cumbrian poet Norman Nicholson observes in his poem 'Wall' that 'A wall walks slowly, | At each give of the ground.'⁶⁹ For Frost, it is an external agent that upsets the hand-made structure; for Nicholson, it is the wall itself that possesses its own agency and moves in accordance with the ground. When Oswald states that she is in need of 'something more baroque', it is uneven and irregular forms such as walking walls she aspires to emulate – the out-of-shape and organically grown poem over the structurally preconceived.

If her early poems resemble dry-stone walls, then those of *Woods etc.* are akin to the knotted and organic forms of hedgerows. Though more implicit in her second collection, the unsettling and paradoxical experience of the gardener remains a factor in Oswald's poetry. After all, without the labourer, the stone wall walks itself until it eventually collapses, while hedgerows grow until they lose their form. In 2009, Oswald published a series of poems entitled *Weeds and Wildflowers*, featuring etchings by the artist Jessica Greenman. In a short introduction to the collection, Oswald states that her hope 'is that reading the book will be a slightly unsettling pleasure, like walking through a garden at night, when plants come right up to the edges of their names and beyond them'.⁷⁰ To read *Woods etc.* is to experience a

⁶⁸ Robert Frost, 'Mending Wall', *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. by Edward Connery Latham (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 33-34 (p. 33).

⁶⁹ Norman Nicholson, 'Wall', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Neil Curry (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 321-22 (p. 322).

⁷⁰ Alice Oswald and Jessica Greenman, *Weeds and Wildflowers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

similar sensation: the poem ‘Owl’, for example, opens at ‘the joint of dawn’ in an intermediary zone in which the speaker is confronted with ‘fear’.⁷¹ As in Oswald’s first collection, the position of the poet in *Woods etc.* is a georgic one, for there is little comfort to be taken in encounters with a half-wild world.

If Oswald’s poems are often made up of borders and boundaries, then in *Woods etc.* these obstacles are more easily overcome than before. In ‘Woods Not Yet Out’ ‘a flap of sacking | does for a stile’ (*We*, p. 9), resembling a looser reworking of the stone foundations of her earlier poems. Likewise, the spaces between fences and hedgerows is less manicured and ordered, full of *Weeds and Wildflowers* (to borrow the title of her collaboration with Greenman). In the collection’s title poem, the poet sweeps together ‘loose tacks of sound’ which also happen to be the ‘scattered parts of [her] body’:

in my throat the little mercury line
that regulates my speech began to fall
rapidly the endless length of my spine
(*We*, p. 7)

The vertebrate structure of the spine is analogous to the dry-stone forms of Oswald’s previous poems. The line of the spine, in this case, is traced by the ‘mercury line’ that stands for the poet’s regulated, and wavering, speech. There is a balance being struck here between the orderly and the free-speaking, between the articulated line and the more wayward, continual traces. In *Woods etc.* Oswald pares down her use of punctuation enough to emphasise her subversion of conventional syntax. The title poem, as is the case for the majority of poems in the collection, eschews the use of capitalisation and concludes with the

⁷¹ Alice Oswald, ‘Owl’, *Woods etc.* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 6; all further references to the poems in this collection are from this edition, hereafter *We*, cited in parentheses in the text. Oswald sources this element of fear from the poetry of Thomas Wyatt. Whereas the iambic line is used to ‘ease the process’ of reading, she argues, Wyatt – whom she labels a ‘fear poet’ – confronts the reader with the ‘unstable rhythm of quiet and disquiet’. For Oswald, the disquieting effect of Wyatt’s verse has to do ‘with the echo and opposition of real sounds within one line. It needs to proceed much more slowly, because the centre upon which the meanings converge lies outside the language, in the pauses’: see Oswald, ‘Introduction’, in *Sir Thomas Wyatt: Poems Selected by Alice Oswald* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. ix–xvii (pp. ix, xvi).

absence of a full stop, creating the impression that it is but one section in a sequence of endless length.

Like Oswald's first collection, *Woods etc.* is scattered with objects and figures made out of stone. The poems 'Song of a Stone', 'Autobiography of a Stone', and 'The Stone Skimmer' form a three-tiered sequence positioned in the middle of the collection. These rocks and pebbles are accompanied throughout by more delicate structures and forms: flowers, seeds, and leaves. The closing line of the poem 'Field' reads as an inventory of things which are not so much solid as shakeable: 'docks, grasses, small windflowers, weepholes, wires' (*We*, p. 25). Oswald's grammar in these lines echoes her earlier 'Sea Sonnet' in that she itemises each object using a simple syntax. In this case, the items are even less fixed and the gaps between words and things appears wider, more windswept.

Her poems are not limited to countryside marginalia either. In 'Another Westminster Bridge', Oswald pays tribute to Wordsworth's sonnet by fashioning her own twenty-first-century version. The poem closes by glancing 'away over the stone wing-bone of the city' (*We*, p. 38), with the bridge – a hybrid structure in which the organic is mirrored in the man-made – suggesting flight as a counter to the force of gravity. The following poem, 'Hymn to Iris', reads as an ode to all bridges and crossings. It concludes:

May two fields be bridged by a stile
And two hearts by the tilting footbridge of a glance

And may I often wake on the broken bridge of a word,
Like in the wind the trace of a web. Tethered to nothing
(*We*, p. 39)

In Greek mythology, Iris appeared as a rainbow and was a messenger between the human the divine. It is also the name from which the iris of eyes and flowers is derived. For Oswald, a bridge can be ethereal and immaterial ('linked cells of thin air') as well as physical ('huge iron sketches of the mathematics of strain') (*We*, p. 39). The final couplet encapsulates Oswald's harnessing of two different types of material throughout: the broken bridges of words are the bricks and blocks of her dry-stone works (note the successive 'and's linking the

phrases together); the ‘trace of a web’, on the other hand, stands for the elements in her voice which are less tangible and are ‘Tethered to nothing’ (again, there is an absence of a full stop at the end of the poem). The wind may be able to pass through gaps in a bridge or a wall but in the movement of a thread it can be detected, even read.

The poem ‘Ideogram for Green’ was originally conceived for installation in a garden as part of a collaboration with Heale Gardens in 1999. ‘I took on the commission’, Oswald explains, ‘because I wanted to have a real mobile poem made, probably out of metal; to hang it from a tree, where the wind would keep chiming it.’⁷² She adds that she was interested in ‘the idea of putting texts back into the landscape’, a notion primarily inspired by Finlay’s garden.⁷³ She also cites Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975) as a source of inspiration, especially

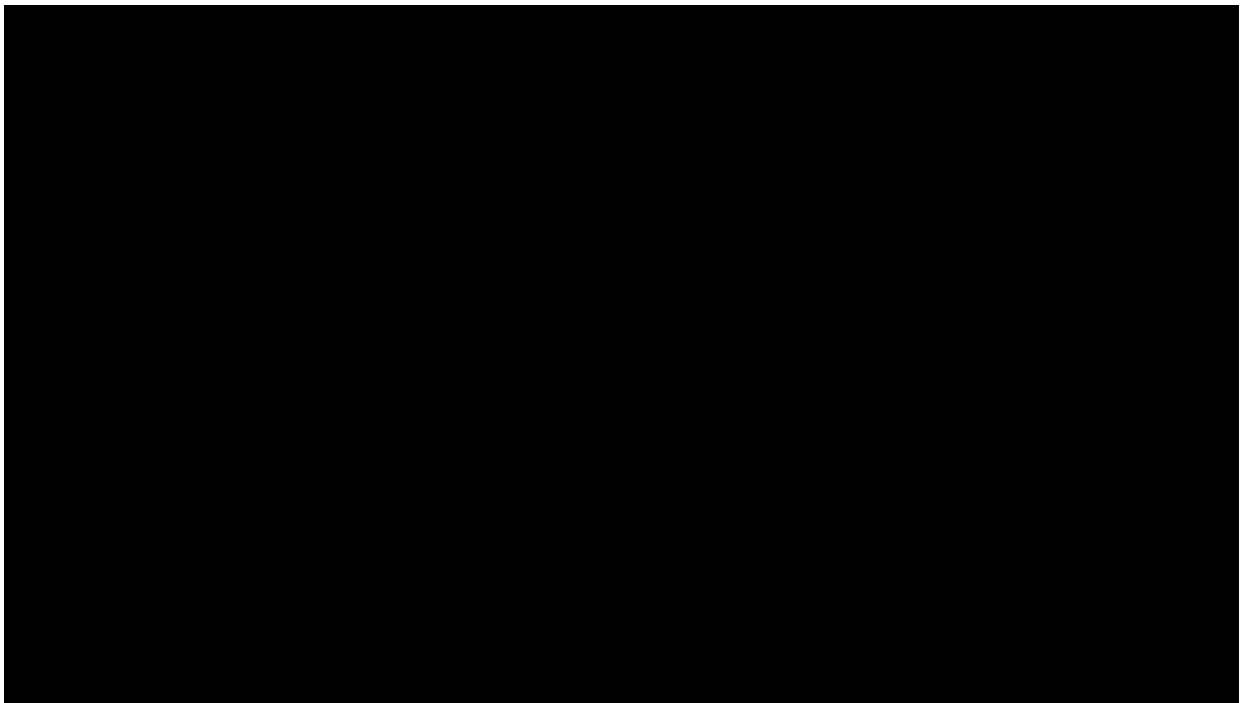


Figure 5.6. Barbara Hepworth, *Mother and Child*, 1934, Cumberland alabaster on marble base, Tate Collection, reproduction from Matthew Gale and Chris Stevens, *Barbara Hepworth: Works in the Tate Collection and Barbara Hepworth Museum St Ives* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999, repr. 2001), p. 46. According to Gale and Stevens the choice of stone for this work ‘can be linked to Henry Moore’s recollection that John Skeaping had introduced his friends to Cumberland alabaster, having been sold lumps of the stone ploughed up by a farmer’ (p. 45); see Henry Moore, cited in *Tate Gallery Acquisitions 1976-8* (London: Order of the Trustees, 1979), p. 117.

⁷² Oswald, ‘The Universe in Time of Rain’, p. 42.

⁷³ Ibid.

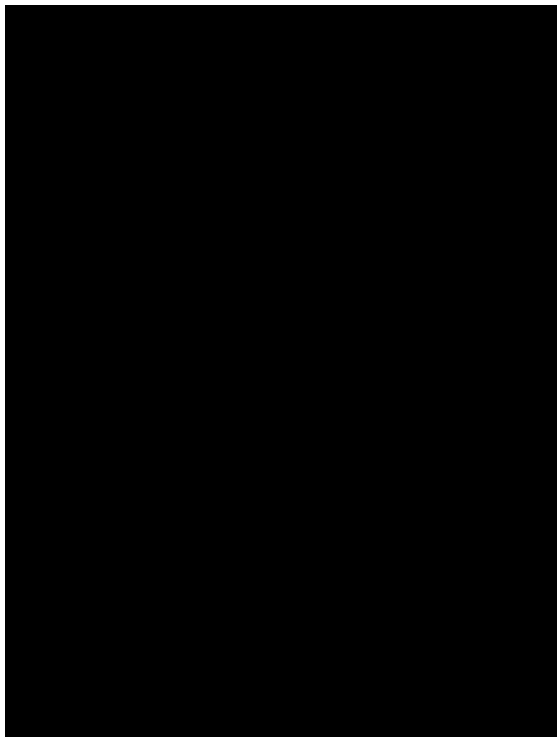


Figure 5.7. Barbara Hepworth, *Corymb*, 1959, bronze on bronze base, artist's garden, Barbara Hepworth Museum, St Ives, reproduction from Gale and Stevens, p. 192. Gale and Stevens's accompanying text to the work includes the following information: 'The title is a botanical term. A "corymb" is one of several types of "indeterminate" inflorescence (or cluster of flowers) in which the lower buds are borne on longer stems (pedicels) giving the cluster a flat head of flowers. Hepworth had long been a keen gardener and the walled studio garden at Trewyn, where her works are sited, provided her with the opportunity to extend this enthusiasm. Although some coincidence of form may be found between a corymb and the sculpture, it is possible that a more general idea of inflorescence linked the two' (p. 192).

her sculptures, which are 'a composition of separate but connected forms'.⁷⁴ Hepworth's numerous 'two forms' and 'mother and child' works emphasise the harmony as well as the distinctness of separate objects (Figure 5.6). Oswald's idea was to harmonise the two notions of words as blocks and threads, an idea she might have sourced from Hepworth, who regularly combined solid materials with string or wire (Figure 5.7). Whereas in Hepworth's works, wire is usually taut, Oswald's mobile poem would be made up of physical words suspended in air, with threads susceptible to the wind. When placed outdoors in the garden, this would mean that stanzas and lines could be read in any number of combinations depending on the conditions. The words would chime as well as float in silence.

In the end, the mobile poem was never realised; it was not, as Oswald articulates it, 'practicable'.⁷⁵ Yet it is appropriate that the idea came up against the resistance of what is possible, especially as Oswald is concerned above all else with the contrariness of natural

⁷⁴ Ibid. Like Finlay, Hepworth integrated her works into a garden by her own design, which now forms part of the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden in St Ives; for more on the garden and its precedents see Chris Stevens, 'Modernism Out of Doors: Barbara Hepworth's Garden', in *Sculpture and the Garden*, ed. by Patrick Eyres and Fiona Russell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 145-55; and for its development see Sophie Bowness, *Barbara Hepworth: The Sculptor in the Studio* (London: Tate, 2017).

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

forces and forms. In order to reconcile her original design for the poem with the practicalities of the page, in *Woods etc.*, Oswald presents the finished work as an ‘ideogram’. Looking to Eastern forms of concrete writing for further inspiration, she references Ernest Fenollosa’s assertion that ‘Chinese ideograms are pictures of all the associations that compile a word’ (the sculpture poem was conceived for instillation in the Chinese Garden at Heale).⁷⁶ As Fenollosa puts it, Chinese poetry ‘speaks at once of the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sounds’.⁷⁷ By presenting her work as a picture-poem, Oswald was able to promote a sense of the words as ‘mobile’, made up of blocks as well as threads. The result is a harmonising of visual and acoustic forms of composition:

Like something struggling to be held
And underfoot and in the heart and

Keeping that promise upon which sunlight takes its bearings

Like through each leaf light is being somehow
Put together in a rush and wedged in a narrow place
(We, p. 26)

The heart is another cavity made up of cords and gaps, and, of course, beats time. The successive and evenly spaced paratactic ‘and’s throughout keep the poem going and place each phrase on an equal footing with the next. Oswald’s syntax also keeps the possibilities of uneven readings open and alive; the use of enjambment encourages the sense that each line is untethered and that the poem may be read out of order regardless of any preconceived design. The poem itself is ‘something struggling to be held’ and resists its own form and bearings: how can light, for example, be constructed like a dry-stone wall? Yet it does not settle on an answer. Instead, a succession of present participles – ‘struggling’, ‘Keeping’, ‘being’ – suggest that ‘green’ cannot be confined by its name and is as much a verb as a noun – that it is something present and ongoing. In *Woods etc.* and throughout her oeuvre, Oswald’s poetry

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. by Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1936), p. 9.

is paradoxically mobile as well as situated or site-specific in a material sense. As Oswald says of the gardener, the poet must to some extent be willing to embrace ‘imperfection’.⁷⁸ The resistance of the materials in the making of her mobile poem meant that she too was presented with the ‘narrow place’ of what is possible. The resulting compromise resembles the green leaves it describes: it is a happening at once grounded and fluid. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the book-length poem Oswald crafted over the same period should take as its subject a river.

⁷⁸ Oswald, ‘The Universe in Time of Rain’, p. 45.

CHAPTER VI

The Epic Poise: Alice Oswald's *Dart* and *Memorial*

And all I ask is this – and you can see
how far the soul, when it goes under flesh,
is not a soul, is small and creaturish –
that every day the sun comes silently
to set my hands to work and that the moon
turns and returns to meet me when it's done.

Alice Oswald, 'Prayer'¹

In his poem 'October Salmon' in *River* (1983), Ted Hughes paints a portrait of a salmon, in the last moments of its life, after it has made the 2,000-mile journey to where it spawned:

About six pounds in weight,
Four years old at most, and hardly a winter at sea –
But already a veteran,
Already a death-patched hero. So quickly it's over!²

As Hughes revealed in his last ever interview, with *Wild Steelhead & Salmon* magazine, published posthumously in 1999, the poem was written after he had visited his ailing father in Yorkshire in the early 1980s:

from a bridge I saw this one fish, a little cock salmon, lying motionless in the clear shallow water—the only fish in a long pool that in October 1961, when I first walked there and counted the fish waiting to spawn in the gravels above and below, had held more than 100.³

As Jonathan Bate observes, the fate of the salmon is shared by Hughes's dying father, who had served with the Lancashire Fusiliers and fought at Gallipoli and in France during the First World War.⁴ But as well as being a 'veiled personal elegy', argues Yvonne

¹ Alice Oswald, 'Prayer', *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*, 1996, p. 40.

² Hughes, 'October Salmon', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Keegan, pp. 677-79 (p. 677).

³ Ted Hughes, 'So Quickly It's Over', *Wild Steelhead & Salmon* (Winter 1999), 49-58, (p. 57).

⁴ Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life*, p. 410.

Reddick, the poem is also a ‘poignant elegy for a damaged ecosystem’.⁵ Hughes’s comments in *Wild Steelhead & Salmon* highlight a more general decline in salmon numbers, and in an afterword to a revised edition of *River*, published in *Three Books* in 1993, Hughes writes that ‘streams, rivers, ponds, lakes *without fish*’ communicate to him ‘one of the ultimate horrors – the poisoning of the wells, death at the source of all that is meant by water’ (emphasis in original).⁶

‘October Salmon’ goes on to describe the ‘bicycle wheels, car-tyres, bottles | And sunk sheets of corrugated iron’ that accompany the salmon on the riverbed. It closes with lines that encompass not only the lamentable aspects of its demise but also the epic dimensions of its existence:

All this, too, is stitched into the torn richness,
The epic poise
That holds him steady in his wounds, so loyal to his doom, so patient
In the machinery of heaven.⁷

As the salmon is held steady in his wounds, the poem itself remains poised, hovering somewhere between the epic and the elegiac, the personal and the political. If, at the start of the poem, the salmon is measured in terms of age and weight, then by the end the full weight of its situation is brought to bear on more than this fish or pool in particular. And if the poem is indeed a veiled elegy, both for an individual and for the environment at large, then so too is it a veiled epic, replete with the martial language and imagery – a homage to the struggle and the grandeur of all life-cycles.

⁵ Reddick, *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet*, pp. 238-39.

⁶ Hughes, ‘October Salmon’, *Collected Poems*, p. 1211. Hughes’s *River* was published with the assistance of The Countryside Commission and British Gas, highlighting both his environmental credentials and the social politics surrounding Britain’s waterways. *Three Books* contains a number of poems added to the sequence which take the form of protest poetry on the subject of river pollution, including ‘1984 on “The Tarka Trail”’ (as discussed in chapter II). For more on Hughes, rivers, and environmentalism see Terry Gifford, ‘Hughes’s Social Ecology’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Gifford, pp. 81-93; Mark Wormald, ‘Fishing for Ted’, in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Wormald, Roberts, and Gifford, pp. 112-129 (p. 125); and Yvonne Reddick, “‘Ichthyologue’: Freshwater Biology in the Poetry of Ted Hughes”, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 22.2 (Spring 2015), 264-83.

⁷ Hughes, ‘October Salmon’, p. 679.

‘October Salmon’ contains within it many of the elements that characterise Alice Oswald’s book-length poems *Dart* (2002) and *Memorial* (2011), which, although differing widely in terms of form and theme, share with Hughes’s poem a focus on populations in their environments. The shadow cast by Hughes’s poetry over *Dart* is perhaps more obvious.⁸ Oswald’s own river poem features a range of voices as it follows the course of the Devon river, one of which is of a fisherman, whose remarks echo those of Hughes in ‘October Salmon’:

a thousand feet between Holne and Dartmeet and he climbs it,
up the trickiest line, maybe
maybe down-flowing water has an upcurrent nobody knows

it takes your breath away,
generations of them inscribed into this river⁹

Though the character in Oswald’s poem is distinct from Hughes, her rendition of the fisherman’s voice in verse form constitutes a homage to a writer whom she has repeatedly drawn attention to as one of her most important influences.¹⁰ Reading the ‘upcurrent’ of this influence in the above lines from *Dart*, it is possible to detect Oswald adopting a similar modal fluency as Hughes does in his poem: the individual salmon’s journey is conceived in epic proportions, while the demise of ‘generations’ is elegiacally ‘inscribed’ as a form of remembrance.

Oswald’s debt to Hughes’s poem in *Memorial* is more oblique, but no less significant. Hughes’s young sea-farer, who is already a ‘veteran’ and marked for death, anticipates the catalogue of violent deaths of Greek and Trojan soldiers in her version of Homer’s *Iliad*. Towards the end of her poem, Oswald describes the river Scamander, on the banks of which many of the soldiers meet their end:

⁸ As Hugh Haughton points out in an essay on *Dart* and other poets’ rivers, Hughes’s 1983 *River* contains a short ‘river-study’ called ‘West Dart’: ‘Water Worlds’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 May 2013, 13-15 (p. 15), an edited version of the British Academy Warton Lecture on English Poetry, given on 22 May 2013.

⁹ Alice Oswald, *Dart* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 8-9. All further page references to *Dart* will be from this edition, cited in the text.

¹⁰ For more on the connection between Hughes’s and Oswald’s rivers see Yvonne J. Reddick, *The Genius of the Stream: Ted Hughes and Fluvial Influence* (doctoral dissertation, University of Warwick, 2012).

Near the old fig tree the cart track
That runs downhill from windy Troy
Passes two springs where the Scamander
Bubbles over stones

[...]

now this whole river is a grave¹¹

The ‘generations’ of Salmon inscribed into the Devon river in *Dart* become in *Memorial* a generation of fighting men. Just as the river Dart springs from two sources, so too does the river and river-God of Homeric myth, himself slain by Achilles. If one of Oswald’s precedents is Homer, then the other is undoubtedly Hughes: for after *River* and Hughes’s public opposition to the pollution of Devon’s waterways, any river that is a grave must in part be a homage to the poisoned streams and pools of Hughes’s protests and poems.

Dart and *Memorial* do not simply echo Hughes in terms of content and tone. Like ‘October Salmon’ both poems are carefully poised in the slipstream between a number of modal currents. Chapter V showed how Oswald interrogates the relationship between the person and their environment on the level of the lyric ‘I’, specifically in the case of the gardener. In her book-length poems, Oswald widens her scope and seeks to give voice to multitudes both human and non-human. She does this by following Hughes, drawing on the conventions of epic as well as lyric, pastoral as well as environmental lament. The argument of this chapter is that the ‘epic poise’ of both *Dart* and *Memorial* also entails the georgic – a protean form that is itself typically made up of a range of other modes: didactic, descriptive, and epic, to name a few.

The georgic is traditionally the mode of transition, mediating pastoral and epic in terms of a poet’s career. Following her debut collection, *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*, and preceding *Woods etc.*, *Dart* was composed during a key stage in the development of

¹¹ Alice Oswald, *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 70. All further references to this text will be from this edition, cited in the text.

Oswald's writing.¹² It may therefore be considered an extension of her concerns in these volumes and a continuation of her lyric writing in extended form. Another way of interpreting *Dart* is as a break from these works before she shifts her attention to epic in her engagement with Homer in *Memorial*. Chapters III and IV echoed other critics in arguing that Seamus Heaney's career corresponds to that of Virgil and follows what is known as the *Rota Virgilli* (Virgil's wheel), progressing from pastoral, via georgic, to epic (just as Heaney made this observation himself in relation to the life and works of Hughes). This chapter makes a similar claim for Oswald, insofar as *Dart* mediates her lyric and epic concerns. Crucially, the poem's preoccupation with work – that undertaken by the river's inhabitants but also the work of the writer – indicates that Oswald's treatment of the lived environment in *Dart* draws on the conventions of the georgic at the same time as it reinvents them.

Oswald prefaces *Dart* with a note explaining its context as well as instructions on the way it should be read:

This poem is made from the language of the people who live and work on the Dart. Over the past two years I've been recording conversations with people who know the river. I've used these records as life-models from which to sketch out a series of characters – linking their voices into a sound-map of the river, a songline from source to sea. There are indications in the margin where one voice changes into another. These do not refer to real people or even fixed fictions. All voices should be read as the river's mutterings.

(*Dart*, p. i)

Critics have for the most part followed Oswald's instructions, interpreting the poem as a 'sonic census', a 'map poem', and a 'songline' respectively.¹³ An exception is Tom Bristow, who in *The Anthropocene Lyric* categorises *Dart* as a 'georgic memorial'.¹⁴ Bristow's focus is on Oswald's documentations of lost industry in the account of the

¹² *Dart* was positively reviewed upon publication and won the T. S. Eliot Prize in 2002. Of all of Oswald's works, it is *Dart* that has garnered the most attention thus far from literary critics.

¹³ Bristow, 'Sonic Census or Poetics of Place in Alice Oswald'; Howarth; and Ben Smith, 'Singing at the Right Pace: The Songlines of Alice Oswald and Thomas A. Clark', *PN Review*, 205 (June 2012), 50-52. Criticism on *Dart* is by no means limited to these three studies, but they are exemplary in that their

interpretations of the poem are founded upon concepts highlighted by Oswald herself in her note.

¹⁴ Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric: An Affective Geography of Poetry, Person, Place*, p. 87.

‘dairy worker’ (*Dart*, p. 29) and in the catalogue of names of ‘dead tinnerns’ (p. 10). Indeed, the poem’s inventory of names foretelling the sombre roll-call of dead Greeks and Trojans in *Memorial*. As this chapter argues, Oswald’s georgics do not merely memorialise – though this remains an important function – for as much as her poetry is focused on the historical, its emphasis is just as much on the vitality of the present and what it means to be alive (and survive) in a specific place. Highlighting the poet’s reworking of local knowledge, her employment of oral accounts – in addition to her anthropological, archaeological, and ecological outlook on the environment and its inhabitants – the following argument examines the georgic attributes of both *Dart* and *Memorial*. In doing so it seeks to unearth elements of both works, as well as the environments they describe, that have so far been passed over.

For Oswald’s long poems to be thought of as georgic, the question must first be addressed: georgic in what sense? In an essay on the legacy of the mode in British Romanticism, Heinzelman defines two different types of georgic aesthetic: ‘enactments’ and ‘entailments’.¹⁵ Offsetting orthodox georgic against a more subversive ‘Virgilian’ tradition, Heinzelman paints a picture of ‘a protean discursive form’ as capacious as it is contradictory:

It is *sui generis* and at the same time adaptable to almost any subject; it narrates agricultural uses of nature and also defines the careerism of the writer (who is no pastoral singer); it advocates “progress,” the march of civilisation, but is subversively archaeological in seeing history as embedded, repetitive, and inescapable; it postulates a sense of nationalism that is global and imperialistic but honors, above all things, a rhetoric of local detail; and it projects a cult of domesticity against an inherently disruptive erotics of labour.¹⁶

This characterisation of the georgic is ‘played out dialectically’, with the scientific and imperialistic progress of the Enlightenment counterpointed against more primitive forms of knowing and experiencing place primarily embedded in the local.¹⁷ Heinzelman makes

¹⁵ Heinzelman, p. 183.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

use of this dialectic to re-examine experimentations of form in Romantic poetry. Yet the critical space opened up by the georgic as Heinzelman reads it is not merely useful with regard to the era in which the mode supposedly ‘became invisible’.¹⁸ Its reverberations can be felt right up to the present moment.

It is with Heinzelman’s theory of georgic entailments in mind that this chapter examines Oswald’s longer poems. In a report written while still working on *Dart* for The Poetry Society (who helped to fund the project), Oswald writes that one of her aims for the poem was ‘to reconnect the Local Imagination to its environment - in particular, in these years of water shortages and floods, to increase people’s awareness of water as a natural resource’.¹⁹ By concentrating on the local particularities of the river Dart – its social, industrial, and environmental politics – Oswald imbues her poem with a didactic, environmentally conscientious tone, highlighting the idea that local perceptions relate to national as well as natural issues and resources, and are therefore global concerns. Like Hughes and Heaney before her, Oswald takes on the roles of both poet-anthropologist (in *Dart*) and poet-archaeologist (in *Memorial*) and in so doing, as a georgic writer, subversively questions those perceptions and uses of the environment which threaten to undermine not only specific places themselves but the way in which they are – in a literary and a lived sense – inscribed and read.

Work in Progress

In *Dart*, Oswald continues her interrogation of the stubbornness of words. Writing in the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* upon the *Dart*’s release in 2002, she admits:

Ideally I’d create water, but I’ve had to make do with mimicking it – a rush of selves, a stronghold of other life-forms.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁹ Alice Oswald, ‘Alice Oswald Creates a River Dart Community Poem for the Millennium’, *The Poetry Society*, <<http://www.poetrysoc.com/content/archives/places/dart/>> [accessed 28 February 2017].

[...]

And then at other times, all that water is only the map-symbol of a search for something else – for a language more opaque and fluid, fragmented, haphazard, instant, inspoken and breath-sensitive than is possible.²⁰

The sense of compromise expressed by Oswald here relates to the difficulties she went on to experience in her efforts to install her poems as objects in the environment of a garden. Poetry can only ever be an abstraction of water, which for Oswald is always ‘greater than poetry’.²¹ The poem itself is the result of a ‘search’ for those properties of language that have the capacity to make her poetry the substance’s equivalent. Georgic work, as presented in *Dart*, therefore includes the work of the writer – both her ‘search’ and research, and her work in language itself. In addition, it also traces the writer’s career, for as Heinzelman explains, the georgic is the model for what he refers to as the ‘career poem’:

that is, one that defines writing as a vocation within the largest possible political economy that includes farming, soldiering, statesmanship, artisanal production, and poetic mythmaking. A determining ingredient of georgic is precisely this advocacy of a composite socioeconomic order.²²

The georgic finds a place for its own production in a network of labour, and in *Dart* it is also the product of a specific place. Oswald does not so much advocate a ‘socioeconomic order’ as use the progress of the Devon river as a way to give order and form to the features of water as well as the voices of the river’s inhabitants – including her own. Like the river on which it is based, *Dart* itself *careers*, for as Heinzelman points out, Virgil’s *Georgics* reminds the English reader of the etymological origins of ‘career’ in the Latin *via*: a road or course or way.²³ To follow the path of Oswald’s poem is to experience the river as both the source of inspiration for the poet and a source of livelihoods for those

²⁰ Alice Oswald, ‘*Dart*’, in *Don’t Ask Me What I Mean: Poets in their Own Words*, ed. by Brown and Paterson, pp. 208-09.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 208.

²² Heinzelman, p. 202.

²³ *Ibid.* See Virgil, *Georgics*, III, 8-11.

who make their living on and around it. *Dart*, according to its author, is both a ‘stronghold’ and a ‘rush’ – a poem as fluid and multi-vocal as it is self-contained. It is at once dialogue and soliloquy, protean and discursive (to borrow these terms from Heinzelman), a formal experiment and a homage to lived experience.

Oswald’s explanations of *Dart* as a work-in-progress are revealing when it comes to her efforts to overcome the limits of language. In her Interim Report, she provides a preliminary catalogue of the many voices that feature in the poem:

I’ve spoken to a huge amount of people. Only a selection of these have found their way into the poem; forester, boat-builder, ecologist, stone-waller, sewage area-manager, canoe-instructor, seal watcher, fisheries officer, salmon fisher, archaeologist All are ‘working’ voices. This reflects my preoccupation with Work as a power-line for language.²⁴

Oswald’s original idea for *Dart* was to collate a series of poems written by the members of the Devon river community, and ‘to orchestrate it like a kind of jazz’.²⁵ As she writes in her report, she soon discovered that ‘it was people’s living, unselfconscious voices, not their poems, that were most awake to the river’.²⁶ For Oswald, work is ‘a power-line for language’ in the sense that it keeps her own writing unsentimental and animated: ‘when a sewage worker talks of liquid being “clarified”, when a fisheries officer talks of the water “riffing” or a stone-waller says “scrudging”’, she proclaims, ‘those words have never had such flare’.²⁷ *Dart* is positively awash with such instances, especially in the form of present participles and gerunds drawn from a rich and diverse pool of vocational dialects.

²⁴ Oswald, ‘River Dart Community Poem for the Millennium’. In the poem itself, the list includes many more ‘working’ voices: a naturalist, tin extractor, woollen mill worker, water abstractor, dairy worker, oyster gatherers, and a ferryman, among others. Absent from the final list, however, are the figures of the ecologist and the archaeologist. It would seem that when Oswald came to edit her poem she saw that confining ecology and archaeology to single ‘characters’ would not suffice. In fact, both ecology and archaeology – as themes and practices – inform her poetry on multiple levels and across a range of voices. There is also the implication that, with a few exceptions, without the ecologist and the archaeologist Oswald’s list of workers are all artisans, suggesting that there is an important distinction in Oswald’s mind between different kinds of work: manual/mental, privileged/working-class, and urban/rural.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. Oswald’s desire to avoid poetic language – at least other people’s – recalls Hughes’s commitment in *Moortown Diary* to exclude ‘the poetic process [...] the process of memory’ in order to do justice to the record of the event described: see Hughes, ‘Preface’ to *Moortown Diary*, *Collected Poems*, p. 1205. If *Dart* retains a degree of the jazz-like structure of her original idea, then it is in the sense that it is written according to similar principles of fidelity to the task at hand as those expressed by Hughes (see chapter I).

²⁷ Oswald, ‘River Dart Community Poem for the Millennium’.

To take just a few examples: ‘coop-felling’ (forester) (p. 11), ‘tufting felting hanks tops spindles slubbings’ (worker at Buckfast Woollen Mills) (p. 19), ‘processing, separating, blending’ (dairy worker) (p. 29). In *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*, it is gardening as experienced first-hand by Oswald that informs the ‘working’ language of the poems. In *Dart*, she sources this perspective from others from a wide range of lifestyles and professions.

In her Hughes Lecture, Oswald makes a point of drawing attention to Hughes’s use of present participles in his poem ‘The Horses’, highlighting the ‘pile-up of words ending in “-ing”’: blackening, brightening, splitting, stumbling [...] as if the language had only just been knocked up’.²⁸ Here, Oswald’s emphasis on the physical properties of words – words as things – is once again associated with improvisation – ‘a kind of [dry-stone] jazz’. Her appreciation of Hughes’s language can be associated with the emphasis placed in *Dart* on the way in which ‘work’ itself *works* on language. It is a georgic appreciation, for, as Fairer points out: ‘the language of georgic is a working language—the language of work, and language consciously *at work*.’²⁹ Oswald’s title for *Dart* attests to the idea of the river as a happening rather than an object: the verb ‘dart’ can mean ‘to spear’ or ‘transfix’, ‘to throw, cast, shoot’, ‘to send forth, or emit, suddenly and sharply; to shoot out; to cast (a glance) quickly and keenly’, and ‘to move like a dart; to spring or start with a sudden rapid motion’ (*OED*). Introducing *Dart*, she writes about how she ‘wanted to give the poetic voice the slip, to get through to technical, unwritten accounts of water’.³⁰ The poem can therefore be seen as Oswald’s attempt to balance the lyrical and the ‘technical’: too much poetry and she risks abstraction; too little and she risks ventriloquizing what Peter Howarth summarises as ‘the detached economic resource

²⁸ Oswald, ‘Wild Things’. See Ted Hughes, ‘The Horses’, *Collected Poems*, pp. 22-23.

²⁹ Fairer, ‘Georgic’, p. 467.

³⁰ Oswald, ‘*Dart*’, in *Poets in their Own Words*, p. 208.

management that [the poem] ostensibly opposes'.³¹ As is often the case with georgic writing, however, the question is not merely one of quantity but one of style.

Dart may be framed as an expression of the eponymous Devon river – 'All voices should be read as the river's mutterings' – but unofficially the poem tells the story of the river's 'edgelands': its alluvium, borders, and floodplains, its agriculture, processing plants, power-lines and pylons, and the many other traces of long-established human activity along its banks.³² Haughton points out how these 'edgelands' are also literary 'hinterlands', and Oswald's voice in *Dart* regularly takes on the registers of former writers as she channels the tributaries of poetic tradition into the flow of her poem:

Oswald's investment in rivers raises larger questions about the relationship between poetry and natural world, and in particular the image and soundscape of the river, the form of water known to all cultures, around which agriculture, cities, societies and myths have evolved from the time of Homer's *Iliad* to the present.

[...] Hughes draws deeply on the topographical Romantic tradition, on Wordsworth, Coleridge and Clare's invention of an ecologically responsive site-specific poetry, which is part of the literary hinterland of *Dart*.³³

In *Dart*, as Haughton makes clear, the river not only links ideas of working and literary landscapes, nature and culture, but through its allusions to a fluvial tradition it charts a progression from Homeric through Romantic to modern and contemporary ways of writing about and experiencing place. As Robert Wells, the Devon-based poet and recent translator of the *Georgics* observes, 'though cast in a didactic form, [Virgil's] poem is without precedent – a new creation'.³⁴ The same could be said of *Dart*, though like

³¹ Howarth, p. 201.

³² The term 'edgelands' was coined in 2002 (the same year as the publication of *Dart*) in an article by Marion Shoard to define the increasingly industrialised areas that mediate the country and the city: see Marion Shoard, 'Edgelands', in *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain*, ed. by Jennifer Jenkins (London: Profile Books, 2002), pp. 117-46. For more on 'edgelands' see Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into Britain's True Wilderness* (London: Vintage, 2012), and Macfarlane, *Landmarks*, pp. 231-61.

³³ Haughton, 'Water Worlds', pp. 13, 15. Observing how Oswald 'seeks to stay clear of Romantic predecessors, with the exception of Clare', Haughton argues that 'nevertheless the closest parallels to *Dart* are in Coleridge and Wordsworth' (p. 14). He draws attention to the poem's 'Coleridge-like' glosses (p. 13), and its precedents in Coleridge's 'To the River Otter' and Wordsworth's 'Prelude' as well as his 'The River Duddon' sonnets.

³⁴ Robert Wells, 'A Note on Translation', *Collected Poems and Translations*, pp. 291-93 (p. 293).

Virgil's *Georgics* it too is the product of multiple sources of influence. Just as any river is in fact made up of many rivers, so *Dart* is capacious in its gathering of materials and styles. It is, as Wells writes of the *Georgics*, 'constructed on a principle of balance and contrast', sweeping up together the artisan and the artist, the poet and the water polluter.³⁵

Appropriately, *Dart* commences with the figure of the walker and it is important that this 'character' comes first for it is he who characterises the poem as a whole:

He consults his map. A huge rain-coloured wilderness.
This must be the stones, the sudden movement,
the sound of frogs singing in the new year.
Who's this issuing from the earth?

The Dart, lying low in darkness calls out Who is it?
trying to summon itself by speaking ...

(p. 1)

The walker's map is representative of the poem itself: in her 'Interim Report', Oswald provides her own map of the Dart in order to illustrate how each voice in the poem is associated with a specific location along the river (Figure 6.1).³⁶ If the inhabitants of the Dart provided Oswald with the raw material for her poem, then the topography of the river provided her with a structure, as her drawing of the work-in-progress shows. Following Oswald's own definition of *Dart* as a 'map poem', Howarth refers to the work as a 'plainly geographical poem' while acknowledging that

Dart's geography is only thinkable because it is a map-poem, using shape, syntax and spacing to present itself to the mind as experience rather than data, and allowing us to sense the Dart's plural and overlapping senses of location through these multiple attentions to sound. The geography of *Dart*, in other words, cannot be thought except through its form.³⁷

As Howarth points out, the poem's geographical elements are inseparable from the onomatopoeic score of the poem's movement, just as the river is itself an acoustic phenomenon. The emphasis, for him, is on how the poem maps the fluidity of

³⁵ Wells, 'A Note on Translation', p. 293.

³⁶ Though he is not listed in the acknowledgements to *Dart*, Oswald's walker could well be a homage to Richard Long (see chapter V), an artist who makes his works by walking, and a map-reader for whom maps are themselves concrete poems.

³⁷ Oswald, '*Dart*', in *Poets in their Own Words*, 208; Howarth, pp. 190-91.

‘experience’ as opposed to charting cartographic, geographical, and scientifically-oriented ‘data’. Oswald’s walker reads his map much as Howarth reads *Dart*, drawing attention to the ways in which the objects marked out on its surface (‘this must be the stones’) are experienced on the ground as ‘sudden movement’ or even as ‘sound’.

Following the voice of the ‘walker’ is that of the folktale character ‘Jan Coö’, who, as Oswald’s marginal note explains, is also referred to as ‘So-and-So of the woods’ and who ‘haunts the Dart’ (*Dart*, p. 4). Jan Coö, the legend goes, was a farm labourer who one day heard a voice being called out to him on the river when in fact it was the sound of the wind. After he went missing, the local farmers knew he had drowned:

I know who I am, I
come from a little heap of stones up by Postbridge,
you’ll have seen me feeding the stock, you can tell it’s me
because of the wearing action of water on bone

[...]

Now he’s the groom of the Dart – I’ve seen him
taking the shape of the sky, a bird, a blade,
a fallen leaf, a stone – may he lie long
in the inexplicable knot of the river’s body

(p. 4)

In the poem, as in the myth, Jan Coö is associated with a particular place and, as a further marginal note explains, ‘Postbridge is where the first road crosses the Dart’ (p. 4). His presence is also marked by a cairn (‘a little heap of stones’) which could be a reference to a number of local landmarks including Sharp Tor (which overlooks the farmhouse that Jan Coö is said to have abandoned), or more likely the ancient ‘clapper bridge’ at Postbridge – a dry-stone structure that evokes both the dry-stone walls of Oswald’s first collection and the stone slabs of a cemetery in anticipation of *Memorial* (Figure 6.2). The term ‘clapper bridge’ is thought to derive from the medieval Latin for ‘a heap of stones’ (*OED*). Jan Coö, like the bridge, is eroded by the action of water, but he also *wears* the river: flesh and bone become water and stone. He is the groom of the Dart and he is also

the husbandman of livestock. For Oswald, Jan Coö becomes a symbol for the entanglements of human lives and non-human forms on the river.

Jan Coö is seduced by the sound of the river before he drowns. Likewise, the reader of *Dart* is instructed to ‘listen’ no less than seven times over the course of the

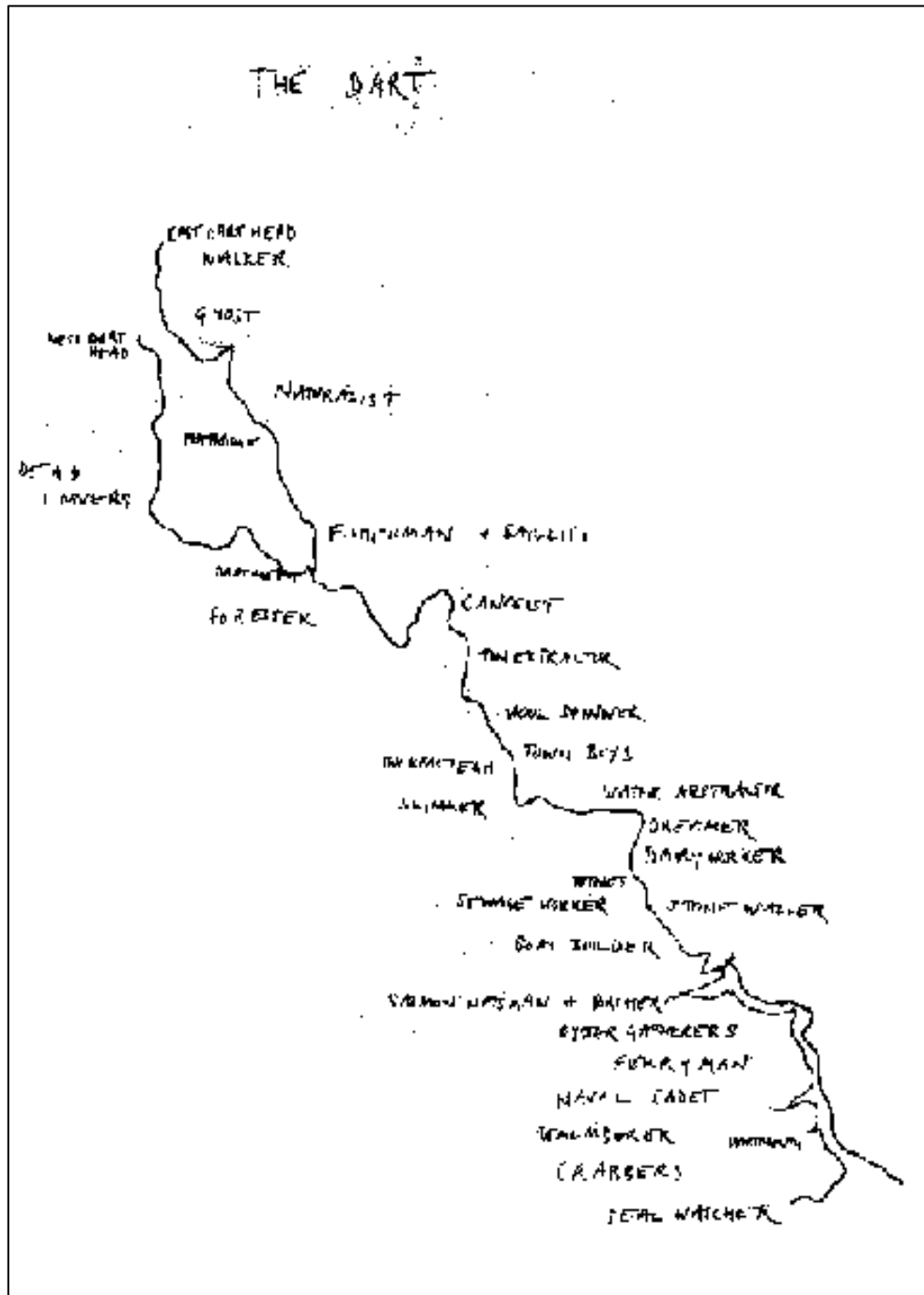


Figure 6.1. A hand drawn map of the structure of *Dart* provided by Oswald as part of her Interim Report for The Poetry Society (Oswald, ‘River Dart Community Poem for the Millennium’).

poem, and its progress is far more often communicated in terms of sound than of sight and other senses. Midway through the poem, after the death of ‘John Edmunds’ (who as the marginal note explains was washed away downriver in 1840), there occurs half a blank page accompanied by a single word in the margin, which takes the form of a memorial: ‘silence’ (p. 21-22). One of the keenest listeners in the poem is the ‘Naturalist’:

shhh I can make myself invisible
with binoculars in moist places. I can see frogs
hiding under spawn – water’s sperm – whisper, I wear soft colours

whisper, this is the naturalist
she’s been out since dawn
dripping in her waterproof notebook

(p. 5)

The naturalist’s attentiveness to place and its non-human inhabitants may be figured in terms of sight (‘binoculars’) but quietness and listening are paramount – hence Oswald’s



Figure 6.2. Chris Downer, ‘Postbridge: The Clapper Bridge’, 25 August 2009, Devon, England. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

recourse to verse in this instance. In fact, this is one of the most muted moments in the poem, ushered in by the naturalist's 'shhh', an abbreviation of the word 'hush', which, as it happens, is both a request for silence and the sound made by swift and smooth flowing water (*OED*). The tone of these lines echoes John Clare – from whom Oswald sources the title to her anthology *The Thunder Mutters* – specifically the opening to his poem 'The Nightingale's Nest':

Up this green wood land ride lets softly rove
& list the nightingale—she dwelleth here
Hush let the wood gate softly clap—for fear
The noise might drive her from her home of love³⁸

Haughton detects in this passage a 'technique that is familiar to us now from TV documentaries and nature programmes, an attempt to transport us vicariously to the bird's habitat in the company of an expert local guide'.³⁹ For Oswald, the precedent is contemporary as well as literary, informative as well as poetic, and while her naturalist is a homage to Clare, she also acknowledges the work of broadcasters as well as naturalists and biologists. The reader of *Dart* is encouraged not only to listen but also to 'whisper', to echo in their reading voice the hushed-tone of the correspondent in the field. Throughout her poetry, assonance and consonance – 'spawn', 'sperm', 'water', 'whisper', 'wear' – encourage sensitivity to the sounds of the human voice, in terms of both musicality and onomatopoeic mimicry.

Oswald even turns the register of the naturalist on themselves, describing them in terms of a creature in their natural habitat: 'she belongs to the soundmarks of larks' (p. 5). Standing close behind Oswald's naturalist is the acoustic ecologist R. Murray Schafer,

³⁸ John Clare, 'The Nightingale's Nest', *The Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, ed. by Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-2003), III, *The Midsummer Cushion* (1998), pp. 456-60 (p. 456).

³⁹ Hugh Haughton, 'Progress and Rhyme: "The Nightingale's Nest" and Romantic Poetry', in *John Clare in Context*, ed. by Haughton, Phillips, and Summerfield, pp. 51-86, (p. 60). As Goodridge observes in relation to the poem 'The Yellowhammer's Nest', 'Clare often, in his poems as well as in his prose, takes the role of the natural historian: and indeed the teacher, for there is a note of georgic didacticism in the manner of his presentation of the material': see John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 137.

who derived the term ‘soundmark’ from *landmark* ‘to refer to a community sound which is unique’.⁴⁰ Oswald’s poem provides an account, through its many voices, of the ‘soundmarks’ of each location (in the case of the naturalist, the songs of larks and frogs). In her ‘Interim Report’, she describes her working methods and how she generated the language of the *Dart*, explaining how she would use a tape-recorder to record a conversation with someone who worked on the river and would then proceed to ‘go home and write it down from memory’.⁴¹ She goes on to say how she would rework ‘these two kinds of record – one precise, one distilled by the mind’ in a mixture of ‘journalism and imagination’ to preserve ‘the idea of the poem’s voice being everyone’s, not just the poet’s’.⁴² *Dart* can therefore be thought of as a ‘community poem’ made of ‘unique’ sounds and voices that are distinct to the river.

Haughton reads *Dart* as an ‘exemplary embodiment of Auden’s idea of poetry itself as something that “survives / In the valley of its saying” and is “a way of happening, a mouth”’.⁴³ He also draws attention to Auden’s ‘late, neo-classical poem’ ‘River Profile’ as one of the modern precursors to *Dart*, especially the way in which ‘poetic identity, language and the river slip into each other’.⁴⁴ Auden once wrote that he could not believe ‘that any artist can be good who is not more than a bit of a reporting journalist’, and Oswald’s combination of ‘journalism and imagination’ in *Dart* attests to this.⁴⁵ The work of the poet in *Dart* is therefore analogous to the work of its many characters, in that the

⁴⁰ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Vermont: Rochester Books, 1994), p. 274. Howarth and others have drawn attention to the debt in Oswald’s work to what is known as ‘acoustic ecology’: see Howarth, p. 199; Pinard, p. 19, and Thacker, pp. 103-04. In her introduction to *The Thunder Mutters*, Oswald mentions Schafer by name and comments on how the concept of ‘acoustic ecology’ contributed towards her selection of poems: see Oswald, ‘Introduction: The Dew’s Harp’, p. ix. For an in-depth reading of John Clare’s poetry using Schafer’s terminology, see Sam Ward, “‘To list the song & not to start the thrush’: John Clare’s Acoustic Ecologies”, *John Clare Society Journal*, 29 (2010), 19-32.

⁴¹ Oswald, ‘River Dart Community Poem for the Millennium’.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Haughton, ‘Water Worlds’, p. 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ W. H. Auden, ‘Psychology and Criticism’, a review of Herbert Read, *In Defence of Shelley* (1936), in *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose*, ed. by Mandelson, 6 vols, I: *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse, 1926-1938*, pp. 130-33 (p. 132).

river is both task and gift, a place of fieldwork as well as a place in which to survive, however uncomfortable or compromised that survival.

Shepherd of Selves

In her introductory note to *Dart*, Oswald draws attention to the question of authenticity: ‘over the past two years’, she states, ‘I’ve recorded conversations with people who *know* the river’ (emphasis added). Implied in this statement is the suggestion that the poet herself has come to know it too, having undertaken her own research in the field during the writing process. But Oswald’s commitment to authenticity in *Dart* is connected to a more self-consciously literary approach to the theme of work. Clare is cited by the poet as a guiding voice behind the way in which the transitions between characters are ‘geographical not rational’.⁴⁶ Andrew Motion is sensitive to this connection and observes how Oswald is one of a number of contemporary poets who learn from Clare in the respect that ‘they have established accurate-looking as a form of preservation and of protest’.⁴⁷ For Motion, the list of voices in *Dart* is ‘instructive’ in the sense that the river is ‘a way of linking the mythical or speculative past to the pragmatic present, of joining dreaming to moneymaking, natural things to manmade things, and solitary being to sociable clusters’.⁴⁸ His summary of the poem suggests that while the authenticity of working voices – with their emphasis on ‘accurate looking’ (and listening) – is key to the preservation of the land, so too are those perspectives which are less knowable, rational, and representable: those of myth, folk tale, and legend. Among *Dart*’s many speakers are ‘a dreamer’ (pp. 27-29) and a ‘rememberer’ (pp. 45-46), who in their utterances attest to the ways in which the river flows through lives and is summoned up by words. Motion’s

⁴⁶ Oswald, ‘*Dart*’, *Poets in their Own Words*, p. 208.

⁴⁷ Andrew Motion, ‘The Poem and the Path’, *Hudson Review*, 62.1 (Spring 2010), 19-54, (pp. 48-49).

⁴⁸ Motion, p. 50.

interpretation is itself instructive in that it accommodates both lived and literary experience, but the links he makes risk a further suggestion that Oswald's poem reconciles opposing views and ways of witnessing the landscape. Throughout *Dart*, Oswald is as attentive to myth and memory as she is to data and geography, but often the poem shows these to be in conflict rather than in harmony.

The dialogue between the 'pragmatic' and the 'mythical' that plays out over the poem is nowhere more apparent than in the imagined exchange between the 'forester' and the 'watery nymph' (pp. 11-13). Whereas the forester's voice is written in prose, the nymph's is communicated in verse:

woodman working on your own
knocking the long shadows down
and all day the river's eyes
peep and pry among the trees

when the lithe water turns
and its tongue flattens the ferns
do you speak this kind of sound:
whirlpool whisking round?

Listen, I can clap and slide
my hollow hands along my side.
imagine the bare feel of water,
woodman, to the wrinkled timber

When nesting starts I move out. Leaving the thickety places for the birds.
Redstart, Pied Flycatchers. Or if I'm thinning, say every twelve trees I'll orange-
tape what I want to keep. I'll find a fine one, a maiden oak, well formed with a
good crop of acorns and knock down the trees around it. And that tree'll stand
getting slowly thicker and taller, taking care of its surroundings, full of birds and
moss and cavities where bats'll roost and fly out when you work into dusk
(pp. 11-12)

The form of the nymph's quatrains is a nod to early modern drama, most notably Puck's song at the end of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (rhyming couplets in a loose trochaic tetrameter). Moreover, the reference to fallen trees as 'shadows' recalls Theseus's as well as Puck's references to actors and characters as 'shadows'.⁴⁹ Oswald is

⁴⁹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), V, 3, 205-6, 401.

insistent in her note to *Dart* that the characters in her poem are not ‘fixed fictions’, and ‘shadows’ offers a good substitute. A note in the margin to the nymph’s address informs the reader that ‘Dart is old Devonian for oak’ (p. 11), encouraging the sense that wood and water are related; the river takes its name from the forest and the poem is a forest of names – ‘they say all rivers were once fallen trees’, adds the forester (p. 12). There are further shadows, those of classical forms, in Hylas (who was seduced by the Naiads) and Salmacis (the nymph who became one with Hermaphroditus), both of whom are directly evoked by Oswald’s nymph (p. 12).⁵⁰ Another possible source is Virgil’s retelling of the plight of Aristaeus, the god of husbandry, in the epyllion to Book IV of the *Georgics* (IV. 315-88).⁵¹ If, as Heinzelman states, a key ingredient in georgic poetry in the Virgilian tradition is ‘a disruptive erotics of labour’ then in *Dart* the process of forestry is figured in terms of a sexual union between the materials of wood and water.⁵² The watery seduction of the nymph is answered by the forester’s passion for trees and their capacity to foster life, and it is no coincidence that Oswald’s forester singles out ‘a maiden oak’ to stand in as a corporeal substitute for the nymph. More remarkable still is the juxtaposition of the contrasting styles of the nymph’s address and the forester’s – the one being fluid and sensual, the other technical and quotidian, with added ‘orange-tape’.

Oswald presents her ‘forester’ as less of a labourer and more of an enthusiast. Indeed, the same could be said in the case of other characters in the poem – the ‘stonewaller’ and the ‘boat builder’ being two notable examples. In the case of the

⁵⁰ Oswald has repeatedly acknowledged her debt to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: see Porter; and Cox. As Haughton points out, both Thomas Warton, in his ‘An Invocation to a Water Nymph’ (1748), and Michael Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* (1612, 1622), are precedents, especially Drayton, whom Oswald anthologises twice in *The Thunder Mutters*, in the second instance with an extract which she gives the title ‘Nymphs of Rivers’ (pp. 30-31, 71): see Haughton, ‘Water Worlds’, pp. 13, 14. For Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion* as a georgic poem see Fowler, p. 204. See also Milton’s *Comus* (1634) (ll. 230-70), and Auden’s ‘In Praise of Limestone’ (1948), the only poem by Auden that Oswald anthologises in *The Thunder Mutters* (p. 137-39).

⁵¹ Virgil depicts the home of the nymph Cyrene (mother of Aristaeus) as the source of the world’s rivers: ‘He found himself, a stranger, in his mother’s house, | A place of caves, lakes, echoes, pillared groves, | Dazed by the bulk of waters, deafened by the noise; | And saw the rivers of the earth as they came rushing | Along their hidden courses’: see Wells, ‘Virgil, *The Georgics*’, p. 202. The appropriately named Wells has worked as a forester on Exmoor in Devon.

⁵² Heinzelman, p. 184.

forester, the emphasis is not so much on what labour takes away from the worker as on the benefits to the environment as a result of his activity. The georgic qualities of *Dart* are more accurately, then, an ‘erotics of work’, a celebration of the life-affirming and life-giving rewards of husbandry.⁵³ *Dart* also communicates an ‘ecology of work’, and, just as emphatically, an ‘erotics of ecology’: Oswald’s channelling of the erotic and the pragmatic gives rise to an appreciation of the environment in which the technical vocabulary of a manual trade is lifted to the level of the lyrical, the fecund, and the sensual.

As much as Oswald’s workers are shown to be in harmony with their surroundings, human impact on the environment is also presented as problematic. John Parham reads in the nymph’s address to the forester the implication that ‘he is damaging the environment, that he is blind to nature’.⁵⁴ For Parham, two elements are highlighted by the Forester and the Nymph:

the notion that human labour can actually encourage an attentiveness to the land and other species; and a humanist concern, encompassing questions of environmental injustice, about the impact of industrial practices and underlying political economy on the working population.⁵⁵

Mid-way through the poem, as the form of the river widens, larger scale industrial complexes flank its banks and pollute the body of the text, with the accounts of the ‘water abstractor’, the ‘dairy worker’, and the ‘sewage worker’ following each other in close succession (pp. 24-30). The impact this has on Oswald’s versification is profound, especially in light of Parham’s comments. In a review of *Dart* in 2002, David Wheatley remarks how ‘Oswald’s delight in the liquid textures of language shows how much she

⁵³ For Tom Bristow, who was the first to provide a thorough critical account of *Dart*, there is an analogue in William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson* (1946-1958). Bristow highlights the importance of the theme of ‘husbandship’ in Williams and how this works as a blueprint for what he refers to as Oswald’s ‘thesis of involvement’: see Bristow, ‘Sonic Census or Poetics of Place in Alice Oswald’, p. 172-76.

⁵⁴ Parham, p. 121.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

has absorbed from the most onomatopoeic of all writers, Joyce.’⁵⁶ Yet Oswald’s riffing on Joyce’s wordplay and his experimentations with form is not restricted to instances of ‘delight’. In the case of the ‘water abstractor’ – who, as Wheatley points out, is a particularly Joycean character – Oswald echoes the catechism structure of the Eumaeus chapter in *Ulysses*, and in doing so increases the didactic pressure upon the character, the poem, and the reader:

have you any idea what goes into water?
I have verified the calibration records
have you monitored for colour and turbidity?
I’m continually sending light signals through it, my parameters are back to back
was it offish? did you increase the magnetite?
180 tonnes of it. I have bound the debris and skimmed the supernatant
have you in so doing dealt with the black inert matter?
in my own way. I have removed the finest particles
did you shut down all the inlets?
I added extra chlorine
have you countervailed against decay?
have you created for us a feeling of relative invulnerability?
I do my best.

(pp. 25-26)

The disembodied questions and the abstractor’s answers take on the form of instructions committed to memory by the abstractor himself, presumably for the purposes of following correct procedure. The question that commences the catechism – ‘have you any idea what goes into water?’ – echoes Hughes’s concerns in his poem of environmental protest about the polluted river Taw: ‘1984 on “The Tarka Trail”’. The technical

⁵⁶ David Wheatley, “‘This is Proteus, whoever that is’”, review of Alice Oswald, *Dart* (2002), *Guardian*, 13 July 2002 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jul/13/featuresreviews.guardianreview13>> [accessed 26 February 2017].

vocabulary and quantitative measurements of the water abstractor's assurances prompts a return to Terry Gifford's questions posited in relation to that poem by Hughes: 'don't we know need to know the data in our poetry? Don't we need to adjust our aesthetic to allow for the poetics to be informed[?].'⁵⁷ Oswald's poetics in *Dart* are certainly informed: her words are sourced from those who work on the river. Yet the final phrase of the 'abstractor', whose job title relates to Oswald's suspicion of literary abstraction – 'I do my best' – is an acknowledgement of individual limitations. These sentiments are echoed by the dairy worker and the sewage worker a few pages on: 'We have to think of our customers [...] We've got weights and checks and trading standards' ('dairy worker') (*Dart*, p. 29); 'The whole place is always on the point of going under [...] Not much I can do' (sewage worker) (*Dart*, p 30). Oswald's characters are frequently shown to be drowning under the administrative pressure of keeping industrial processes in check against the odds, at the cost of the environment. The technical vocabulary and data on show in the abstractor's catechism is in one respect 'informed', but implicit in its relentless flow is an environmental consciousness – one that contradicts the level of 'invulnerability' assumed by the 'us' of the water-consuming population.

Oswald concludes her poem by answering the question set out at its opening:

'Who's this moving alive over the moor?' (p. 1):

This is me, anonymous, water's soliloquy,

all names, all voices, Slip-Shape, this is Proteus,
whoever that is, the shepherd of seals,
driving my many selves from cave to cave ...
(p. 48)

Water is never just water for Oswald (even if she would prefer it that way), and she finds an equivalent for the river in the shape-shifting classical figure of Proteus. The epithet accompanying his mention in *Dart* – 'shepherd of seals' – is borrowed from Homer's

⁵⁷ Gifford, *Green Voices*, pp. 11-12.

Odyssey (IV. 400-24), but another source is Virgil's *Georgics*, in which the seer provides one of the many narrative frames in the poem's epyllion in Book 4. The narrative follows Virgil's didactic instructions on the cultivation of bees and concerns the plight of Aristaeus, whose hives have become blighted with disease. Aristaeus appeals to his mother, the nymph Cyrene, who directs him to the shape-shifter Proteus, surrounded by 'a lumbering flock | Of gross sleek seals to shepherd on the bed of the sea'.⁵⁸ Virgil takes Homer's epithet and elaborates on it, couching Proteus in the larger context of the art of husbandry.⁵⁹ Furthermore, in Virgil's version, to avoid capture Proteus becomes 'a flowing river' (IV, 445). In *Dart*, Proteus is representative of the multiform Devon river, but he is also husbandman of the poem's many selves, 'driving' as well as being driven on by its flow. As Heinzelman observes, 'the survival of the *Georgics* in literary history depended mainly upon this Orphic fable, this Proteus-centered allegory'.⁶⁰ In *Dart*, what he goes on to identify as 'the protean georgic' not only survives in Oswald's allusion to the fable, but also in her sustained and varied account of the relationship between person and environment, and likewise environment and poet.

A Kind of Oral Cemetery

In her introduction to *Memorial*, Oswald states: 'this is a translation of the *Iliad*'s atmosphere, not its story' (*Memorial*, p.1). She then goes on to explain how in the process of translation she removed the narrative content of Homer's epic. 'What's left,' she says,

is a bipolar poem made of similes and short biographies of soldiers, both of which derive (I think) from distinct poetic sources: the similes from pastoral lyric (you can tell this because their metre is sometimes compressed as if it

⁵⁸ Wells, p. 89.

⁵⁹ In *Georgics* IV, Aristaeus learns from Proteus that in order to restore health to his bees he must first satisfy the wood-nymphs of Eurydice, and so contained within the Proteus narrative is an account of Orpheus, the poet, lyre player, and charmer of animals, whose disembodied head continues to sing down the river Hebrus. In her more recent collection, *Falling Awake*, Oswald returns to the myth of Orpheus in the poem 'Severed Head Floating Downriver': see *Falling Awake* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016), pp. 6-10.

⁶⁰ Heinzelman, p. 190.

originally formed part of a lyric poem); the biographies from the Greek tradition of lament poetry.

(p. 1)

Putting Oswald's claims of Homer's source material to one side for a moment, *Memorial* is distinct in Oswald's oeuvre in that it is a translation – in the loose sense of the term – and that it is a direct engagement with epic. For Oswald, however, Homer is not primarily a poet of war but is rather a poet of people, even of place. Introducing *Memorial* elsewhere, she writes that her version is a collection of 'anti-heroic' stories made up of biographies of minor as well as major characters who are for the most part ordinary soldiers.⁶¹ More than this, as in *Dart*, her 'excavation' also draws attention to 'anonymous people': 'the farmers, walkers, mothers, who inhabit [Homer's] similes'.⁶² Oswald's 'bipolar' structure puts these two strands of the *Iliad* in conversation with one another as they play out over the course of the poem. The gap where Homer's narrative once stood functions instead as a negative space in which the heroic and the 'anti-heroic' come into contact: so too do the literary modes of the epic, the lament, the pastoral – and, significantly, the georgic.

Commenting on *Memorial*, Oswald once again draws attention to the notion of poetic fieldwork and the idea of responsibility to people and place. In an interview with Naomi Jaffa, she emphasises how the sense of place is an important aspect of the *Iliad* and how people are 'incredibly accurately, topographically placed in Homer—':

You feel like he's got a map of the whole of ancient Greece, and he knows where each man comes from and who their parents were—and that's amazing to me, the kind of song-line idea that poems can be kind of maps of places.⁶³

Having experimented with the idea of the songline in *Dart*, Oswald finds the concept relevant to Homer's *Iliad*.⁶⁴ Just as *Dart* echoes aboriginal songlines – which oriented

⁶¹ Alice Oswald, 'Memorial', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 231 (Winter 2011), p. 14.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Naomi Jaffa and Alice Oswald, 'A Conversation with Alice Oswald', *Brick*, 90 (Winter 2013), 17-20 (p. 20).

⁶⁴ As the novelist and travel writer Bruce Chatwin, in his semi-fictional *The Songlines* (1987), explains: 'Aboriginal Creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who had wandered over the continent in the

people in their environment via the medium of the spoken and the written word – so too, for Oswald, does Homer when he provides an account of a soldier’s ancestry and origins in a particular place. Moreover, oral composition is by its very nature rooted in a relationship with the land. Oliver Taplin suggests that ‘Homer’s own image for the memory-sequence of poetry seems to be the path’, adding that ‘he may have mapped his poetic path in the sand’.⁶⁵ A memorial is both something remembered, in the sense of a mnemonic device, as well as being a way of commemorating lost lives. Reading *Memorial* echoes the experience of reading *Dart* in that to follow the poem is to traverse a physical landscape. But whereas *Dart* takes its form from a river, *Memorial* recreates the experience of visiting a war memorial, where gravestones line each path and the origins of soldiers are geographically distinct.⁶⁶

Speaking to Cox, Oswald repeats her claim regarding the origins of Homer’s similes in an ancient pastoral tradition:

for me, there was the feeling of the huge text of the *Iliad* being a landscape that I wanted to dig things out of. Almost as if the real bodies of the real soldiers were lying there in the poem, and I was going to dig down and recover them [...] And also I feel that the *Iliad* itself is an accumulative poem. I don’t feel it just happened at one moment. I feel it has layers and layers from different ages and actually I think that some of the bits that I’m more interested in possibly predate the Trojan War. You know I like the idea that perhaps the similes come from an even more ancient pastoral tradition, and that one might be dipping back into a very pre-classical culture.⁶⁷

Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path – birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes – and so singing the world into existence’: see *The Songlines* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 2. Robert Macfarlane has suggested there is a family resemblance between this cosmology and language traditions in the British Isles, specifically with regard to the Gaelic lexicon of landscape and place names in the Outer Hebrides: see ‘A Counter-Desecration Phrasebook’, in *Towards Re-Enchantment: Place and Its Meanings*, ed. by Gareth Evans and Di Robson (London: Artevents, 2010), pp. 107-30, (p. 112). A similar comparison can be made in the case of Oswald, the river Dart, and Devon. Indeed, Oswald makes this connection herself when she calls her poem a ‘songline’ in her introductory note, and subsequently Ben Smith has used the concept of the Aboriginal songline as a framework by which to examine ‘the interrelationship of movement, language and landscape’ in *Dart*: see Smith, ‘Singing at the Right Pace’, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of The Iliad* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 36. Taplin compares this process to the one described in Chatwin’s *Songlines* (p. 36, n. 48).

⁶⁶ For a reading of *Memorial* in which Oswald’s poem is compared to a number of physical war memorials see Carolin Hahnemann, ‘Book of Paper, Book of Stone: An Exploration of Alice Oswald’s *Memorial*’, *Arion*, 22.1 (Spring/Summer 2014), 1-31.

⁶⁷ Oswald, cited in Cox.

Oswald's claim of Homer's pastoral origins is in line with the theories of certain classical scholars and theorists of the pastoral.⁶⁸ The primary concern in this chapter is not with the accuracy of her claim but with her insistence upon using the term 'pastoral' when to some it would appear anachronistic.⁶⁹ Earlier in this chapter, it was suggested that Oswald's career as a poet corresponds to Virgil's, progressing from pastoral (*The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*), via georgic (*Dart*), to epic (*Memorial*). It is now necessary to complicate this chronology. In the context of *Memorial*, it would be more accurate to say that Oswald's role is similar to that of an oral poet such as Homer, constructing her poem by placing different traditions side-by-side: epic and pastoral. Yet Virgilian terminology is inescapable and remains relevant to Oswald's long-term project. Keeping Virgil's tripartite career in mind, the remainder of this chapter reads the gap where Homer's narrative used to be as a space in which Oswald cultivates the georgic.

The first section of *Memorial* takes the form of a litany of all those who die over the course of the poem and extends for eight pages, with each name inscribed in capitals. Sections from this master list reappear over the course of the poem, as well as at moments when Oswald deviates from her formula of biographies and similes:

And
 MENESTHES
 ANCHIALOS
 AMPHIUS
 TLEPOLEMOS
 COERANUS
 CHROMIUS
 ALCASTOR
 ALCANDER

⁶⁸ For a theory of the similes as a sub-genre in the *Iliad* and their origins in choral lyric and 'nonepic' traditions see Richard P. Martin, 'Similes and Performance', in *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text*, ed. by Egbert Bakker and Ahuvia Kahane (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 138-66 (p. 139). For their origins in folklore see Leonard Muellner, 'The Simile of the Cranes and Pygmies: A Study of Homeric Metaphor', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 93 (1990), 59-101 (p. 73). For the origins of the pastoral mode in pre-Homeric culture see Leo Marx, *The Pilot and the Passenger: Essays on Literature, Technology, and Culture in the United States* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 188, and David M. Halperlin, *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 86-87.

⁶⁹ For the argument that the pastoral begins firmly with Theocritus and that it was 'conscious of its distance from Homeric poetry' see Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, p. 15.

HALIUS
 PYRTANIS
 NOEMON
 TEUTHRAS
 ORESTES
 TRECHUS
 OENOMAUUS
 HELENUS
 ORESBIUS
 PERIPHAS
 And

(p. 25)

Falling within the main body of the poem, this smaller list is bookended by two instances of the coordinating conjunction ‘And’, which connect these names to every other soldier and places them – grammatically at least – on an level of equal importance. Speaking to Jaffa, Oswald explains that behind her decision to focus on soldiers’ names and biographies, their origins and deaths, was ‘a kind of political stance and partly also a structural point’, and the connection between her democratic stance and the democratic structure of the poem is encapsulated by Oswald’s use of the list.⁷⁰ Indeed, *Memorial* represents the highpoint of her preoccupation with paratactic structures. Writing in the *New Statesman*, she explains:

An oral poet - and Homer was one (or several) - works in chorus with his predecessors, learning from them a repertoire of rhythmical phrases that enable him to compose spontaneously in metre. The tendency of his grammar is therefore cumulative, like a cairn.⁷¹

As Minchin confirms, oral epic is for the most part paratactic: ‘syntactically equivalent clauses, and even syntactically dissimilar clauses, are placed side by side; there is little subordination’, and he adds that parataxis is also a feature of spontaneous spoken language.⁷² Oswald describes her biographies of the soldiers in the *Iliad* as ‘paraphrases’

⁷⁰ Oswald, cited in Jaffa, p. 19.

⁷¹ Oswald, ‘The Unbearable Brightness of Speaking’.

⁷² Elizabeth Minchin, “‘Translation’ and Transformation: Alice Oswald’s Excavation of the *Iliad*”, *Classical Receptions Journal*, 7.2 (2015), 202-22 (p. 219). Oswald’s democratic stance is also part of the legacy of modernism. ‘I would say the best translation of the *Iliad* is David Jones’ *In Parenthesis* [1937],’ says Oswald to Cox, ‘it’s not a translation, it’s its own thing, but to me it’s got something of the feeling of real people and a real world’: see Oswald, cited in Cox. Another possible influence is Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* (1925—) in particular Canto XVI, in which Pound employs parataxis to itemise the literary and artistic

of the Greek and her lack of punctuation throughout emphasises her use of a simple grammar (p. 2).

‘Stripped of its plot,’ Oswald states, ‘the *Iliad* is a scattering of names’.⁷³ In *Memorial*, Oswald exchanges narrative plot for plots of ground in a cemetery and for the most part does not distinguish between major and minor characters. Her version of Homer is still mindful of national history, but by focusing on minor characters she reduces the original’s assertions of imperial might and celebration of nation-building. A special place is reserved for Hector, who is the final soldier to feature in the poem, but even he, as Oswald puts it, ‘died like everyone else’ (p. 71). In Oswald’s poem the heroic is brought down to size, and despite the fact that Hector comes last in her version, the language used to describe him is no more or less elaborate than that used to describe ordinary soldiers. In Hector’s case, Oswald temporarily suspends parataxis for hypotaxis, but only to achieve the same effect: ‘He was in charge of the Trojans | But a spear found out a little patch of white’ (p. 71). In the end, like every other casualty, Hector is ‘returned to the ground’ (p. 72).

Introducing *Memorial*, Oswald refers to the work as ‘a kind of oral cemetery’ (p. 2). Elsewhere, speaking to Jaffa, she explains what she means by this and refers to what she understands to be the origins of oral epic:

I studied the classics for four years, but never went to Greece until two years ago. And when I finally went there, I saw these incredible big monumental stones commemorating people’s deaths, with nothing on them—just blank stones. So you can really see that a poem is necessary to remember their stories.⁷⁴

Turning to Homer’s *Iliad*, Oswald unites her preoccupation with the idea of poetry as sculpture with her understanding of the oral tradition, locating in the idea of unmarked

causalities of World War I: ‘And Henry Gaudier went to it, | and they killed him [...] And Wyndham Lewis went to it, | With a heavy bit of artillery [...] And Ernie Hemingway went to it, too much in a hurry | And they buried him for four days’: see Ezra Pound, ‘Canto XVI’, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1970, repr. 1996), pp. 68–72.

⁷³ Oswald, ‘The Unbearable Brightness of Speaking’.

⁷⁴ Oswald, cited in Jaffa, p. 20.

gravestones an equivalent to the poem-sculptures of Ian Hamilton Finlay (see chapter V). In ‘The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force’, Simone Weil writes that far from any single character, the ‘true hero, the true subject, the centre of the *Iliad* is force’.⁷⁵ She goes on to define force as ‘that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing [...] it turns man into a stone’.⁷⁶ As Stephe Harrop has suggested, Weil’s analysis is doubly relevant to Oswald’s ‘excavation’ of Homer’s original.⁷⁷ Indeed, the ‘thing’ that occupied the space between stones in the ‘gap-stone stile’ of Oswald’s earlier poem ‘The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile’ in *Memorial* re-enters the equation. The first death in the poem, that of PROTESILAUS, who was the ‘first to die’, concludes: ‘He’s been in the black earth now for thousands of years’ (p. 13). Elsewhere, writing of DAMASOS, Oswald predicts: ‘In years to come someone will find his helmet | Shaped like a real head’ (p. 45). In Oswald’s archaeological treatment of Homer, as in Virgil’s *Georgics*, time metamorphoses individuals into things.

Oswald’s landscape is figured as a mass grave and in this respect the poem shares qualities with the poetry of Edward Thomas, and by association the ‘field work’ of Seamus Heaney, in that it too can be considered what Longley terms as an ‘interrupted georgic’.⁷⁸ Many of the solders in the *Iliad* were also farmers and in Oswald’s poem their agricultural background is brought into relief. A large proportion of the biographies feature rural labourers uprooted or tempted away from their homelands, as in the case of ISOS and ANTIPHOS who ‘used to be shepherds [...] And didn’t want to farm anymore | And went riding out to be killed by Agamemnon’ (p. 35-6). EPECLES as he dies remembers ‘the river | That winds between his wheatfields and his vineyards’ (p. 45). Of ILIONEUS we are told that ‘His parents had a sheep farm’ (p. 52), and the only

⁷⁵ Simone Weil, ‘The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force’, *Chicago Review*, 18.2 (1965), 5-30 (p. 5).

⁷⁶ Weil, ‘Poem of Force’, pp. 5-7.

⁷⁷ Stephe Harrop, ‘Speech, Silence and Epic Performance: Alice Oswald’s *Memorial*’, *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies*, 8 (2013), 79-91 (p. 82).

⁷⁸ Edna Longley, ‘War Pastorals’, p. 466.

information that is imparted about MELANIPPUS is that he was ‘not really a fighter more a farmer’ (p. 57). By highlighting *Iliad*’s ‘anti-heroic’ elements, then, Oswald’s poem emphasises its agricultural elements. IPHIDAMAS is described as ‘an arrogant farmhand fresh from the fields’:

Poor IPHIDAMAS now he is only iron
 Sleeping its iron sleep poor boy
 Who fought for Helen for his parents’ town
 Far from his wife all that money wasted
 A hundred cattle he gave her
 A thousand sheep and goats
 All that hard work feeding them wasted
 (p. 38)

As Stopa-Hunt observes, the many references to the remembered labour of animal husbandry throughout have the effect of making the reader wonder: ‘who will feed the livestock now?’⁷⁹ In the form of lists, Oswald’s typography places each soldier in relation to the earth in the context of a mass grave. In the biographies, however, when Oswald says that SIMOISIUS was ‘born on the banks of the Simois’ and was ‘Son of Anthemion his mother a shepherdess’ (p. 15); or when she says that PYLAEMENES ‘came from the Black Sea those dusty plains’ (p. 24), or that SARPEDON ‘Came from his cornfields from his leafy river | From his kingdom of paths and apple groves’ (p. 61), the effect is different. Rather than placing each man metaphorically in the earth and their name onto a stone, Oswald restores them topographically (as in Homer) to a specific place. In doing so, she demonstrates that in reality there is little difference between ‘home front’ and battlefield, between one man’s land and no-man’s land, and that epic and georgic – and pastoral – feed into one another.

⁷⁹ Stopa-Hunt.

A History of Leaves

Oswald describes the combination of pastoral and epic elements in her poem like the image of ‘flowers on graves’ (*Memorial*, p. 2). In a similar vein, Teju Cole describes the appearance of similes between the death scenes ‘like grass between an array of gravestones’ (Figures 6.3 and 6.4).⁸⁰ In light of these comments, *Memorial* sees the return of Oswald the gardener-poet, except this time the garden is a graveyard or, specifically, a war memorial. In the similes that comprise the other half of the poem, Oswald inverts the structure of the biographies: in the accounts of soldiers’ deaths it is the rural world that is



Figures 6.3 and 6.3. Flowers between graves, and a wall of names, Arras Memorial, Arras, France (the burial place of Edward Thomas) (photographs taken by Ralph Pite, April 2017).

⁸⁰ Teju Cole, ‘All the Names: Alice Oswald’s *Memorial*’, *Brick*, 90 (Winter 2013), 13-16 (p. 14).

disrupted by war. By interspersing these accounts with translations of Homer's similes, however, the epic flow of the poem is interrupted by imagery drawn from rural life and the natural world. As Oswald states in her introduction, her similes are in each case a translation (she prefers the term 'translucence') of Homer, but by giving them equal weight in relation to the martial material of the original she emphasizes their quieting as well as their disquieting effects (p. 1).⁸¹ To amplify each one, Oswald repeats them word for word, with a few exceptions. As she states to Jaffa, the original purpose behind the repetitions was to give listeners and readers a pause, to provide a 'breathing space' between each violent death.⁸² Yet the content of each simile works against this design and features descriptions of violence in nature equivalent those in war. As Teju Cole puts it, 'there is nothing restful, nothing easy', in Oswald's (and Homer's) depictions of the world beyond the battlefield: 'it is a tense place, red in tooth and claw, conveying the helplessness to which Fate consigns all living beings'.⁸³

Cole's assessment of *Memorial* is reminiscent of the controversial reception of Hughes's early work. In 1971, Roy Fuller wrote of the 'pathological violence' of the language in Hughes's *Crow* poems.⁸⁴ But as Hughes explained in an interview, his 'idea of *Crow* was really an idea of a style', to write 'in a super-simple and super-ugly language which would in a way shed everything'.⁸⁵ To take an example, these are the opening lines to the poem 'Lineage':

In the beginning was Scream
Who begat Blood
Who begat Eye
Who begat Fear
Who begat Wing
Who begat Bone

⁸¹ For a useful flow chart showing the source of each of Oswald's similes in the *Iliad* see Hahnemann, pp. 31-32.

⁸² Oswald, cited in Jaffa, p. 19.

⁸³ Cole, p. 14.

⁸⁴ Fuller, 297. For more on Hughes and violence see Bentley, *Ted Hughes, Class and Violence*.

⁸⁵ Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 208.

Who begat Granite⁸⁶

And so on. There is a similarity between Hughes's 'super-simple and super-ugly language' and Oswald's excavations in *Memorial* and her reduction of Homer's style. Hughes comments upon how the style of *Crow* was determined by its form as song legend, which in its 'archaic perspective requires simplicity' (*WP*, p. 242). Oswald faced a similar challenge in *Memorial*, in that she had to find a way of representing an archaic pre-classical Greek world-view. In her answer to this challenge she takes her example from Hughes and not only draws from *Crow* but channels those aspects of Hughes she admires in his translations and in *Moortown Diary*, in which his style – as she puts it in characteristically paratactic fashion – is 'very swift and bright and urgent and speakable'.⁸⁷

In *Memorial*, Oswald writes of wanting to restore the *Iliad*'s '*energeia*', which she translates as 'something like "bright unbearable reality"' (p. 1). It is a word she borrows from Book XX of the *Iliad* in which the gods are described in their true forms (XX. 130-31).⁸⁸ In *Memorial*, it might just as readily be applied to the experience of the weather and of working outdoors. In many cases, Oswald sources her imagery from Homer's descriptions of natural phenomena or 'acts of god', as in the case of Thunder, Lightning, and Fire (pp. 20, 28, 33), to draw from many examples. In this respect, Oswald's idea of the *Iliad*'s *enargeia* is similar to Weil's understanding of the poem's force: 'anything in nature that is set into motion by the violence of external forces'.⁸⁹ If many of the poem's soldiers were also farmers, then in the similes the threat of war is compared to that of the weather:

Like a rainbow shining a warning to the world
A bright banner of disruption hung above the fields
Meaning war perhaps or maybe just a summer storm
So that everyone stops work and looks up and the flocks grow restless

⁸⁶ Ted Hughes, 'Lineage', *Collected Poems*, p. 218.

⁸⁷ Oswald, 'Wild Things'.

⁸⁸ Oswald, 'The Unbearable Brightness of Speaking'.

⁸⁹ Weil, 'Poem of Force', p. 22.

(p. 30)

If we recall from Chapter II in Hughes's poem 'Birth of Rainbow' the appearance of a rainbow before a storm frames a scene of animal husbandry. In *Memorial*, however, its appearance is associated with violence, as the unpredictability of the whims of the gods threatens to disrupt the habitual rhythms of rural work, with Oswald providing another more menacing version of her own 'Hymn to Iris' in *Woods etc.*. In the biographies, it was the prospect of war that made farmers restless; in the similes, the weather has a similar disquieting effect on herdsmen as well as their herds.

Throughout *Memorial*, Oswald translates scenes of human activity drawn from rural life, as with the Ditch Maker, the Farm Boy, and the Winnowers (pp. 27-28, 41, 48). After the death of ADRESTUS she repeats the simile:

Like a good axe in good hands
Finds out the secret of wood and splits it open
When a man for example cuts out timbers for a boat
And his axe is an iron decision swinging his arm
(p. 29)

Here, Oswald calls to mind not Hughes but Heaney in a poem entitled 'A Shiver' in *District and Circle*: 'The way its iron head planted the sledge [...] The staked earth quailed and shivered in the handle'.⁹⁰ Oswald's axe echoes Heaney's sledgehammer in that both poets draw attention to the martial potential of handling tools, and splitting and piercing are frequent means of killing throughout *Memorial*. The splitting open of wood in the simile is like the puncturing of soldiers elsewhere in the poem, as when it recounts Diomedes killing ECHEMMON and CHROMIUS with the anachronistic image of how he 'tin-opened them out of their armour' (p. 21). Everyday tools are translated into weapons and even the boats referenced above might also be engineered for war. Recalling Weil's definition of force, Oswald's similes are indeed comparisons, for in scenes of

⁹⁰ Seamus Heaney, 'A Shiver', *District and Circle*, p. 5.

manual labour, as in the poem's more violent passages, the force of a blow has the capacity to turn a person into iron.

The final section of *Memorial* consists of a series of unrepeated similes (with the exception of the very final simile) positioned typographically halfway down each page.

One of these describes the process of threshing:

Like chaff flying everywhere at threshing time
The winnowers waft their fans and the wind does its work
And a goddess is there picking the grain from its husk
While a fine white dust covers everything
(p. 74)

Here, the connection between war and peace is pitched differently. There are still traces of violence in this passage: a 'thresh' is a flail and the verb, related to 'thrash', which means to beat out corn in order to shake out the grain (*OED*). Again, the weather and the gods intervene, but this time they themselves partake in the labour of the harvest, just as the winnowers work in harmony with the force of the wind. The third line even suggests a harvesting of souls, or death as a Goddess who is also worker-woman. As 'a fine white dust covers everything', the dust also settles on Oswald's account of the battle. Life, it would appear, goes on. Another of the closing similes reads:

Like leaves who could write a history of leaves
The wind blows their ghosts to the ground
And the spring breathes new life into the woods
Thousands of names thousands of leaves
When you remember them remember this
Dead bodies are their lineage
Which matter no more than the leaves
(p. 73)

The question is rhetorical, for no-one is capable of archiving each leaf or indeed each life. The weather and the seasons cause the leaves to fall just as soldiers who were once farmers fall on the battlefield. Oswald reminds the reader/listener that dead bodies are the lineage of the names throughout *Memorial*, but she also draws attention to the fact that dead bodies are also the lineage of leaves, their organic forms the result of decomposition. Her point is that in terms of natural cycles a human life is about as

important as a leaf. But this is not so say that for her the soldiers' lives are of little importance; it is, rather, that they *matter* as much as leaves – they are of the same matter. As Oswald writes of the death of IPHIDAMAS: 'Grief is black it is made of earth' (p. 39).

Just as *Dart* conflates culture and nature without harmonising them, so Oswald's unification of the epic and pastoral does not reconcile the natural and the human. Instead, it levels them, placing human life on the scale of the animal and the vegetable. Another of the poem's final similes reads: 'Like wandering tribes of flies that gather in sheds | In shadowy spring when the milk splashes in buckets' (p. 76). Here, it is important to distinguish between the pastoral mode as it is generally perceived and the 'pre-classical' tradition Oswald sources from Homer. Whereas Oswald understands the pastoral in a received sense to mean escapism and retreat, in *Memorial* there is no such trace of nostalgia for the past. Rather, humans and animals alike are located in a world of struggle: flies are compared to tribes and soldiers are compared to flies, feeding off the milk that is spilt by the farm labourer. In this sense, it might have been more accurate for Oswald to refer to a pre-classical 'georgic' condition in Homer, in which survival is figured in terms of work as well as war, such as in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. If the epic is an aggrandising mode in which the ordinary is side-lined, then the georgic positions the everyday and the down-to-earth at its centre. In Oswald's 'excavation' of Homer, the environment of the battlefield of Troy is transposed to a backwater farm that could just as easily be ancient or modern.

CONCLUSION

Digging the *Georgics*

And you face yet other work in caring for your vines,
for which you can never do enough.

Virgil, *Georgics*, II. 397-98¹

Listen, who reads the classics? And who cares
whether a georgic works or what Virgil said,
or whether its meaning now remains good

Eavan Boland, 'An Irish Georgic'²

In her 'Afterword' to the United States edition of Oswald's *Memorial*, the Irish poet Eavan Boland draws attention to what she imagines to be the 'splendid air of unfinished business' in oral versions of the *Iliad*:

For the reader of a later age, living in an era of fixed text, there is something bright and moving in this image of the *Iliad* as a river, not an inland sea, flowing in and out of song, performance, memory, elegy and human interaction.³

Despite the fact that, as Boland states, Oswald's poem 'stands squarely on an epic foundation', the image she conjures of the *Iliad* – and by implication *Memorial* itself – as a river inadvertently describes the ways in which the georgic has survived in the poetry of those living in a 'later age'.⁴ Like oral epic, the georgic is, metaphorically speaking, more of a river than a sea, and even in an era of 'fixed text' it does not stand still, but flows in and out of epic, elegy, and the poetry of human interaction with the natural world. By remaining attentive to ways in which, in Auden's formulation, poetry 'survives | In the valley of its making', this thesis has demonstrated how, in the work of Hughes, Heaney,

¹ Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Janet Lembke (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 34.

² Eavan Boland, 'An Irish Georgic', *A Woman Without a Country* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), pp. 48-49 (p. 48)

³ Eavan Boland, 'Afterword', in *Memorial: A Version of Homer's Iliad* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2012), pp. 83-90 (p. 89)

⁴ Boland, 'Afterword', p. 84.

and Oswald, the georgic remains current, pressing, and relevant – not only for those on isolated farms but also to the ‘busy griefs’ of a wider readership.⁵

As in Boland’s statement, however, the georgic workings of these poets, no matter how ‘bright and moving’, are often implicit, analogous, and tacit. In Hughes’s *Moortown Diary*, the georgic is forever on the verge of being delivered fully formed but often results instead, as Hughes puts it in *Cave Birds* (1975), in ‘the remains of something [...] muddled as an afterbirth’.⁶ Hughes’s *Moortown Diary* poems – his ‘bits & pieces from this other Eden’ as he once described them – may be throwaway, the results of a literary experiment he came to think of mostly in negative terms, but nonetheless their significance for the survival of the georgic in contemporary poetry cannot be overstated.⁷ In 1980, Hughes’s wrote of *Moortown*: ‘its growing into other people will be a slow business’ (*LTH*, p. 432). When it comes to the farming poems of that volume in particular, Hughes appears to have underestimated their immediate impact.⁸ Yet his forecast has turned out to be prophetic in the sense that their status in the estimation of others has today proved greater than ever.

As in Hughes’s case, in Heaney’s early work the georgic is an ‘analogue’ – albeit a highly significant one – to his own evocations of farming life. By the time he came to write *District and Circle*, however, the examples of Virgil’s *Georgics* and Hughes’s

⁵ Auden, ‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats’, p. 248.

⁶ Hughes, ‘The Risen’, *Collected Poems*, pp. 439-40 (p. 439).

⁷ Hughes, ‘To Glyn Hughes: [November 1979]’, *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Reid, p. 430. In a letter to Sagar in 1990, Hughes complains that ‘I get the feeling, whenever I’ve heard that annotated *Moortown Diary* mentioned, that readers get more out of the notes than the verses’: see *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar*, ed. by Sagar, p. 180. What Hughes could not have anticipated is that the combination of these elements has determined their significance for a revival of the georgic.

⁸ In a piece for *The New York Review of Books* in 1982, the poet Richard Murphy sums up the achievement of Hughes’s output from the late-1970s to the early-1980s (including *Moortown*) by stating: ‘Ted Hughes is surviving’: see Richard Murphy, ‘Last Exit to Nature’, a review of Ted Hughes, *New Selected Poems* (1982), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *Cave Birds* (1975), *Under the North Star* (1981), and *Moortown* (1979), *New York Review of Books*, 29.10 (10 June 1982) < <http://0-www.nybooks.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/articles/1982/06/10/last-exit-to-nature/> > [accessed 11 July 2018]. A commentary on the farming poems, however, dominates this positive review. For another positive review which draws equally positive conclusions about *Moortown* see John Bayley, ‘Facts and Making’, a review of Ted Hughes, *Moortown* (1979), Thom Gunn, *Selected Poems 1955-1975* (1980), and W. S. Graham, *Collected Poems 1942-1977* (1980), *London Review of Books* 2.3 (21 February 1980), 14-15.

Moortown Diary had provided Heaney with a definitive model for articulating the troubled aspects not only of the Ireland's '*terra tremens*' but of the world at large.⁹ Likewise, *Moortown Diary* continues to be an important precedent for Oswald as she seeks to forge new ways of capturing the 'contrary' forces of the natural world.¹⁰ She may have once claimed that the *Georgics* was not enough for her 'in theory', but, as chapters V and VI revealed, thanks to the examples of Hughes and Finlay, it turns out to have been an enabling factor from her first collection to more recent work.¹¹

Even where the georgic has been overlooked, or in cases when it is actively resisted by these poets, it has nonetheless recommended itself by proving to be not only an adaptable but also a doggedly persistent mode. Reviewing Frost's *Selected Poems* in 1936, Auden identified 'two kinds of nature poets':

the man who lives in the country because he has to, because he works there; and the sensitive who lives in the country because he can afford to and because he dislikes the city [...] The former can be divided again into two classes, the landed gentleman who is responsible for his land but does not work it with his own hands, such as Virgil of the *Georgics*, and the small farmer who works it himself. Of this last Robert Frost is almost the only representative.¹²

Auden's characterisation of the poet's position in Virgil's *Georgics* may be accurate, if a little dismissive, but, as this thesis has demonstrated, when it comes to the poem's afterlife in contemporary poetry the georgic can illuminate the work of those writing in the same class as Frost. If anyone stands as a testament to this it is Hughes, who is a farmer/poet in the strictest sense.¹³ Oswald's experience of manual labour primarily

⁹ Heaney, 'Anything Can Happen', p. 15.

¹⁰ Oswald, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile'.

¹¹ Oswald, cited in Cox. Since *Memorial*, Oswald's output has expanded to include a lyric collection, *Falling Awake* (2016), and a loose treatment of Homer's *Odyssey* in the form of *Nobody* (2018), a collaboration with the watercolour artist William Tillyer.

¹² W. H. Auden, '[Robert Frost]', a review of Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* (1936), in *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose*, 6 vols, I, pp. 137-41 (p. 138).

¹³ As George F. Whicher remembers, 'Frost was dead set not to appear either academic or literary. He was all farmer. When it came to my turn to speak with him, we spent an animated ten minutes discussing the healthful properties of horse-manure': see George F. Whicher, 'Sage from Boston', in *Mornings at 8.50: Brief Evocations of the Past for a College Audience* (Norwood, MA.: The Hampshire Bookshop for Amherst College, 1950), pp. 34-39 (p. 35). Reminiscing on remarks made by Hughes about other writers, Heaney recalls that Hughes once told him: 'Robert Frost looked like a chimpanzee: short body, long arms, big hands': see Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 393. Hughes had met Frost in the late-

comes from gardening, but her body of work serves as an example of the survival of different versions of the georgic: that of the poet/labourer in *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* and *Woods etc.*, and that of a different sort of field-worker in *Dart* and *Memorial*. Heaney recalls in an interview with O'Driscoll that once he had embarked on the path of his education there was little expectation that he would return to run the farm: 'I was being "educated", and that meant being set a bit apart.'¹⁴ As Richard F. Thomas observes, however:

the farmer/poet is a paradox in many ways, a fiction, both in the context of the urbanity of Augustan Rome as in that of Heaney's world, rooted in the farm of his father but tempered by his own position as university teacher and poet engaged with British and Irish poetic traditions.¹⁵

Heaney's and Virgil's circumstances may have been different, but the paradoxical and characteristically georgic dynamic of the farmer/poet remains as evocative for readers and productive for writers as ever. Heaney may not have been, as he once put it, a 'true farmer/poet', but the georgic's capaciousness – its ability to accommodate both the sophisticated and the mundane, the rustic and the urbane, the poet and the farmer – helped him to negotiate the full complexity of his 'earthed and heady', rooted and uprooted, not to mention 'parochial' and political options as a poet.¹⁶

Although it was the *Aeneid* that Virgil left unfinished at the time of his death, the *Georgics* is also fundamentally about things being incomplete, ongoing, and in need of further work. As Boland says of oral epic poetry, there is an 'air of unfinished business' about the georgic, and this is especially true of its presence in contemporary poetry.

1950s when he was living with Sylvia Plath in Boston, though at the time he appears to have been more interested in Frost's stories about Edward Thomas: see Ted Hughes, 'To Daniel Hews: 25 November 1958', *Letters*, ed. by Reid, pp. 133-35.

¹⁴ Heaney, cited in O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*, p. 56.

¹⁵ Thomas, 'The *Georgics* of Resistance,' p. 141.

¹⁶ At a joint reading given by Fallon and Heaney at Villanova University in 2010, Heaney honours Fallon by stating: 'as poet he retains his secret, individual source life North of Dublin, just as Frost had '*North of Boston*', and the work comes from there. He is the true farmer/poet.' see 'A Special Evening with Seamus Heaney and Peter Fallon', online video recording, YouTube, 6 May 2010 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dom-3DJzVs0>> [accessed 12 July 2018]; Heaney, 'The Loose Box', *Electric Light*, pp. 14-16 (p. 14), see Kavanagh, 'The Parish and the Universe', p. 282.

While the georgic in the poets of this study is gestured to obliquely, the ground work of this thesis has cleared the way for further examinations into the recent work of others. Boland herself attests to this with her poem ‘An Irish Georgic’ in the collection *A Woman Without a Country* (2014). ‘Who cares’, she proposes, whether the georgic still ‘works’: ‘Listen, if you had seen what happened, | heard the details, knew what lay ahead of us, you would,’ she affirms in reply.¹⁷ The poem recounts the damming and flooding of the Liffey valley in the year 1940 (the year of Day Lewis’s wartime *Georgics* translation), to make the Poulaphouca Reservoir (also known as the ‘Blessington Lakes’) in County Wicklow.¹⁸ Over the course of its five brief sections there emerges a deep contemplation of Irish history: ‘the years of greed, | of taking and dissembling’, those damaging years of British colonial rule as well as those of the economic downturn following the more recent boom and bust of the so-called economic ‘Celtic Tiger’.¹⁹ As in Heaney’s proto-georgic ‘At a Potato Digging’, the inescapable facts and forms of the famine – a time ‘when ghost estates | wandered the Irish countryside’ – also begin to surface.²⁰ ‘If there is an ethic to a Georgic,’ writes Boland in response to these calamities, ‘let it be the down to earth and literal, | sifting, critical and absolute devotion to a way of life.’²¹

Surely the hope is a story can stay open
with its anthems of small details singing,
its cup still on its dresser

and all of it unfinished in this form
that needs little enough to become a hymn
to the durable and daily implement, the stored
possibility of another day. And nothing more.²²

¹⁷ Boland, ‘An Irish Georgic’, p. 48.

¹⁸ In ‘Anna Liffey’, in *In a Time of Violence* (1994), Boland reformulates Auden’s ‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats’: ‘Consider rivers. | They are always en route to | Their own nothingness. From the first moment | They are going home. And so | When language cannot do it for us, | Cannot make us know love will not diminish us, | There are these phrases | Of the ocean | To console us’: see Eavan Boland, ‘Anna Liffey’, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp. 199-205 (p. 204).

¹⁹ Boland, ‘An Irish Georgic’, p. 48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Like the work of Hughes, Heaney, and Oswald, Boland's georgic is one of small details. Her cup on the dresser stands as a homage to the 'daily implements' of a suburban twenty-first century way of life. As she writes in her autobiographical feminist account *Object Lessons* (1995), 'the poet's vocation—or, more precisely, the historical construction put upon it—is one of the single, most problematic areas for any woman who comes to the craft.'²³ Taking this into account, the georgic in Boland's hands becomes one of the ways in which a writer can come to terms with the legacy of different kinds of historical constructions – the physical and the literary.²⁴ This is not to say that they can be fully overcome through the employment of a distinctly 'Irish Georgic', which for Boland is oxymoronic in the same way, historically speaking, as a 'woman poet'. In the final sentence of *Object Lessons*, Boland writes of the breaking of gendered barriers in life and in poetry: 'it is important not to mistake the easy answer for the long haul'.²⁵ The georgic, for her, is a means of expression in this 'long haul', a form of postcolonial 'resistance' similar to that of Heaney, but with an additional set of obstacles relating to gender.

A 'literal, | sifting, critical and absolute devotion to a way of life' can, as Boland implies, also describe the life of the intellectual. In Geoffrey Hill's *Odi Barbare* (2012), presented as the fifth of six 'Daybooks' in his 2013 volume *Broken Hierarchies*, poetic labour is once again equated with that of the farmer:

What is far hence led to the den of making
 Moves unlike wildfire; not so simple-happy
 Ploughman hammers ploughshare, his *durum dentem*
 Digging the *Georgics*.²⁶

²³ Boland, *Object Lessons*, p. 80.

²⁴ In a poem entitled 'A Difficult Birth, Easter 1998', the Welsh poet Gillian Clarke, who lives and farms in rural Ceredigion, conflates the Good Friday Agreement of the Northern Irish peace process with her experience of the birth of a lamb from 'an old ewe' and describes the episode in Hughesean terms: 'We strain together, harder than we dared. | I feel a creak in the limbs and pull till he comes | in a syrupy flood. She drinks him. famished, and you find us | peaceful, at a cradling that might have been a death': Gillian Clarke, 'A Difficult Birth, Easter 1998', *Four Fields* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998), p. 17.

²⁵ Boland, *Object Lessons*, p. 254.

²⁶ Geoffrey Hill, 'Odi Barbare: XXIV', *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 858. The form and title of the sequence are inspired by the *Barbarian Odes* (*Odi Barbare* in Italian) (1877) of the Italian poet 'Giosuè Carducci. 'Barbarian', in the

In an essay on Dryden in *The Enemy's Country* (1991), Hill draws attention to the notion that 'there is at times in the digging and delving of the craft [of poetry] a blind complacency between "otium" [ease] and "labor" [toil]'.²⁷ He then proceeds to delve into Dryden's translation of the *Georgics*, hitting upon 'the easily "shining Share" [...] where Virgil has the "durum . . . dentem", the "hard tooth" of the "blunted share"'.²⁸ In Hill's summation, language must be 'worked on enough' so that 'time-saving prefabrications' do not undermine the gravity of a poet's situation.²⁹ It is a trap that he is wary to avoid in his own poetry, with its densely-worded syntax and frequent, obscure allusions (in the case of *Odi Barbare* many of them to Virgil).³⁰ As chapter V has shown, in Oswald's poetry the act of writing is akin to digging in that it puts the poet into contact with the stubbornness of words, a dynamic she finds to be a diluted but nonetheless worthwhile equivalent to that of the manual labourer's struggle in outdoor conditions. In Hill's account, 'a poet's words and rhythms are not so much his utterance so much as his resistance', but in his case they constitute an ethical rebuke to what he terms a poet's 'unhappy circumstances': 'the current reckonings of value in the society of his [or her] day'.³¹

In *Mercian Hymns* (1971), Hill memorialises the industrial servitude of his grandmother in the West Midlands, 'whose | childhood and prime womanhood were spent

context of Carducci's poems, refers in one sense to the pre-Christian classical ages of Greece and Rome, but in his own sequence Hill writes: 'Like Carducci meant, barely more than rustic; | Not urbane [...] I | Hate Barbarians' (Hill, 'Odi Barbare: II', p. 836). Hill also sources his form from Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (*The Old Arcadia*) (1590).

²⁷ Geoffrey Hill, 'Unhappy Circumstances', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 176-91 (p. 182).

²⁸ Hill, 'Unhappy Circumstances', p. 189. See Virgil, *Georgics* I. 261-62, and *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Hooker and others, 20 vols, V: *Poems: The Works of Virgil in English 1697*, ed. by Roper and Dearing, p. 163.

²⁹ Hill, 'Unhappy Circumstances', p. 182.

³⁰ One of the epigraph's to Hill's *Odi Barbare* is taken from Virgil's *Aeneid* (II. 509-11). Elsewhere in the sequence, he refers to Virgil's love of bees, a reference to *Georgics* IV (p. 836).

³¹ Hill, 'Unhappy Circumstances', p. 179. See also Robert Macfarlane, 'Gravity and Grace in Geoffrey Hill', *Essays in Criticism*, 58.3 (2008), 237-56.

in the | nailer's darg.'³² *Odi Barbare* finds the poet casting his mind back once more to his childhood in Worcestershire, remembering a time when 'Breathing hard we wrestled asbestos brake-pads'.³³ In Hill's later work, the question is raised of how and why in a 'post-*Georgics*' age, it is worthwhile, arguably essential, to be channelling the 'labor' of Virgil.³⁴ Hill may insist that the enterprise is one of the utmost seriousness, yet he too appears to wrestle with the inevitable 'otium' that comes from taking pleasure in the crafting of poetry. Hill's ploughman is presented as 'not so simple-happy', but in the stanza the poet is 'Digging the *Georgics*' in another sense, with his onomatopoeic sounding of Virgil's Latin – 'durum dentem' – hammering the point home melodiously, not just morally.³⁵ Hill's craftsmanship chimes with the way in which this thesis has remained attuned to the more playful aspects of georgic poems through close readings, inviting the conclusion, to channel Heaney and Kavanagh, 'that there's health and worth in any talk about | The properties of [poetry]'.³⁶

In *Moortown Diary*, Hughes captured the agricultural circumstances of his day, and of his day-to-day working life, by means of a verse diary. His 'casual journal notes' find an echo in Hill's 'Daybooks' in which, as Stephen James observes, there is a 'tendency to retain an impression of the notepad (or 'daybook') jotting in the finished – or perhaps the insistently unfinishable – poem'.³⁷ The notion of a georgic 'daybook' is realised in Sean Borodale's *Bee Journal* (2012), which, in a homage to the apicultural instructions in Book IV of Virgil's *Georgics*, provides a detailed chronicle of the poet's

³² Geoffrey Hill, 'Mercian Hymns: XXV', *Broken Hierarchies*, ed. by Haynes, p. 107.

³³ Hill, 'Odi Barbare: XXVI', p. 860.

³⁴ Hill, 'Odi Barbare: XVI', p. 850.

³⁵ Here, we might recall the 'The song of the tubular steel gate' in Heaney's poem 'Quitting Time' from *District and Circle*, p. 69.

³⁶ Heaney, 'The Loose Box', p. 14.

³⁷ Stephen James, 'The Nature of Hill's Recent Poetry', in *The Salt Companion to Geoffrey Hill*, ed. by Andrew Roberts (Cambridge: Salt, forthcoming) <https://research-information.bristol.ac.uk/files/47928644/James_Nature_of_Hill_s_Recent_Poetry.pdf> [accessed 13 July 2018].

experiences of beekeeping in Somerset.³⁸ Like Hughes and Oswald before him, Borodale utilises a journalistic ‘note-poem’ form in order to reduce the proximity between the finished work and the beekeeper’s lived experience.³⁹ This fidelity to, in Heaney’s words, ‘the music of what happens’ gives rise to details that are characteristically georgic.⁴⁰

In a 2013 essay on ‘Rural Realities and Rustic Representations’, Nick Groom raises the question:

How many poets, writers, artists, and film-makers of today’s countryside will mention single farm payment, subsidies, set-aside, movement orders, DEFRA, ear-tagging, castration rings, veterinary bills, milk yields, rights of way, stock fencing, feed supplements, Azulox, silage and haylage, and purple spray, rather than the pastoral clichés that have tyrannized the land for decades, centuries even?⁴¹

In *Bee Journal*, Borodale does precisely this, with each poem documenting the highs and lows of beekeeping: the emotional peaks and troughs as well as the percentages and equations that, as the poet shows, have now become a fundamental aspect of apicultural husbandry.⁴² In ‘14th August: Bee Inspector’, for example, Borodale anticipates Groom’s call for a poetics of ‘DEFRA’:

Today a DEFRA bee inspector clipped the wings of our queen.
What happened to those clippings?
Her flightless life is in that box of ours:
hoarded earth bit of her, no flight.⁴³

³⁸ The last decade has seen a revival in the poetry of bees: see in particular, in addition to Borodale, Carol Ann Duffy’s ‘Virgil’s Bees’ alongside other poems from her collection *The Bees* (London: Picador, 2011), and Jo Shapcott, ‘Six Bee Poems’, *The Poetry Society*, 2011 <<http://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/six-bee-poems/>> [accessed 15 June 2015].

³⁹ Sean Borodale, *Bee Journal* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012). The book’s blurb on its inside cover states that the poems within ‘were written at the hive wearing a veil and gloves’. Meanwhile, on its back cover, an endorsement from Oswald echoes Hughes’s original ‘Preface’ to *Moortown Diary*: ‘This book is a kind of uncut home-movie of bees. I like its oddness and hurriedness, its way of catching the world exactly as it happens in the split-second before it sets into poetry. These are pre-poems, note-poems dictated by phenomena.’

⁴⁰ Seamus Heaney, ‘Song’, *Field Work*, p. 56.

⁴¹ Nick Groom, “‘Let’s discuss over country supper soon’: Rural Realities and Rustic Representations’, *The Clearing* (22 August 2013) <<https://www.littletoller.co.uk/the-clearing/lets-discuss-over-country-supper-soon-rebekah-brooks-and-david-cameron-rural-realities-and-rustic-representations-nick-groom/>> [accessed 13 July 2018].

⁴² See in particular the poems: ‘25th July: Brood Frame Check’ (p. 20), ‘7th August: Brood Frame Check’ (p. 24), ‘17th October: Audio Recording’ (p. 67), and ‘6th January: Epiphany’ (p. 80).

⁴³ Sean Borodale, ‘14th August: Bee Inspector’, *Bee Journal*, p. 25. The acronym ‘DEFRA’ stands for ‘the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’, the governmental department in charge of agriculture, fisheries, food standards, rural communities, and environmental issues.

Borodale's 'clippings' can be compared to Hughes's 'rags and tatters', Heaney's 'raggle-taggle' elements, and Oswald's 'docks, grasses, small windflowers, weepholes, wires': all are georgic scraps, and are a testament to the mode's insistence on the untidier and less aesthetically pleasing, yet no less significant, features of working landscapes.⁴⁴ In her 2013 collection *Red Devon*, the poet and former journalist Hilary Menos evokes livestock farming in the county where Hughes once lived, worked, and wrote (and where Oswald continues to do the same), raising the same breed of cattle as Hughes's beloved bull Sexton. In the poem 'UK364195', which comes towards the end of the collection, Menos asks herself and her partner in the enterprise: 'what we've achieved [...] or more properly perhaps, what we have done?':

Tinkered here and there; let well alone
(though more by luck than judgement or design);
learned more of what we can't do than what we can;
passed on just a little of what we've learned.⁴⁵

The poem takes the form of a sonnet, its rhyme scheme being simple (couplets) but also subtle: 'alone' rhymes with 'design' and 'can' with 'learned'. Its title, however, more bluntly refers (as a footnote to the poem explains) to the 'DEFRA herd/flock mark' of the poet's farm, a number which by legal requirement is stamped on the ear tags of each animal.⁴⁶ Menos's 'flock mark' recalls the inclusion of fertiliser ratios in Hughes's poetry, as well as Oswald's 'weights and checks and trading standards' in *Dart*.⁴⁷ The presence of such features in a poem, then – whether a sonnet, a Hughes-esque 'note-poem', or a river-epic – provides a literary tag identifying it as georgic.

⁴⁴ See Hughes, *Poetry Archive*; Heaney, 'In the Country of Convention', p. 173; and Oswald, 'Field'.

⁴⁵ Hilary Menos, 'UK364195', *Red Devon* (Bridgend: Seren, 2013), p. 61.

⁴⁶ Menos, 'UK364195', p. 61. At the end of the collection, Menos provides further notes in the style of Hughes's *Moortown Diary* on subjects ranging from 'Pesticides' to 'Super-weeds' to 'Agricultural run-off' to 'Growth hormones', imbuing her notes with more of a pronounced environmental agenda than Hughes's (p. 64).

⁴⁷ Ted Hughes, '1984 on "the Tarka Trail"', pp. 841-44 (p. 843); Oswald, *Dart*, p. 29.

As C. Day Lewis makes clear, for stylistic as well for cultural purposes, ‘every classical poem worth translating should be translated afresh every fifty years’.⁴⁸ Although it remains to be seen if any of the recent translations of the *Georgics* by poets such as Robert Wells in England (1982), Peter Fallon in Ireland (2004), or Christina Chew (2002), Janet Lembke (2005) and Kimberly Johnson (2009) in the United States, achieve the status of Dryden’s or Day Lewis’s versions, if the number of recent translations is anything to go by, the example of Virgil undoubtedly remains relevant to poets writing today.⁴⁹ By doing more than ‘tinkering’ with the georgic ‘clippings’ of Hughes, Heaney, and Oswald, this thesis has put forward the case (perhaps ‘more by luck than judgement or design’), that poetry and agriculture continue to speak to each other through the georgic. Such an endeavour has far-reaching implications, but it has also been a lesson in working within limits: its focus on three writers has yielded a modest richness, but, in the words of Virgil, as far as any further work goes, ‘the saying must wait for others’.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ C. Day Lewis, ‘Foreword’, *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by Day Lewis, pp. 7-8 (p. 7).

⁴⁹ See Wells, ‘Virgil, *The Georgics*’; Fallon, *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by Fallon; repr. Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Fallon; Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Christina Chew (Indianapolis IN.: Hackett, 2002); Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Lembke (2005); and *Virgil’s Georgics: A Poem of the Land*, trans. by Kimberly Johnson (London: Penguin, 2009). See also Simon Armitage’s *Still* (London: Enitharmon, 2016), which pairs translated passages from Virgil’s *Georgics* with archive photographs of First World War battlefields.

⁵⁰ Book IV. 147-48: Wells, ‘Virgil, *The Georgics*’, p. 202.

Bibliography

Primary

- Heaney, Seamus, *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966)
- ‘Celtic Fringe, Viking Fringe’, a review of George Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry* (1969) and *Conor Cruise O’Brien Introduces Ireland*, ed. by Owen Dudley Edwards (1969), *Listener*, 2108 (21 August 1969), 254-55
- *Door into the Dark* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969)
- *Wintering Out* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972)
- *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975)
- *Field Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979)
- *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-78* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980)
- and Ted Hughes, eds. *The Rattle Bag* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982)
- *An Open Letter* (Derry: Field Day Theatre Company, 1983)
- ‘Poet to Poet: Seamus Heaney on Patrick Kavanagh’, *Listener*, 2854 (19 April 1984), 14
- ‘Place, Pastness, Poems: A Triptych’, *Salmagundi*, 68/69 (Fall 1985-Winter 1986), 30-47
- *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988)
- *Seeing Things* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991)
- *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995)
- ‘Tributes to Fallon: 25 Years of Gallery Press’, *Irish Literary Supplement*, 14.2 (Fall 1995), 6
- ‘Burns’s Art Speech’, in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, ed. by Robert Crawford (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), pp. 216-33
- *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)
- ‘A Great Man and a Great Poet’, *Observer*, 16 May 1999
<<https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/1999/may/16/featuresreview.review2>>
[accessed 20 December 2017]
- *Electric Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001)

- ‘Eclogues “In Extremis”’: On the Staying Power of Pastoral’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 103C.1 (2003), 1-12
 - *Anything Can Happen: A Poem and Essay by Seamus Heaney with Translations in Support for Art for Amnesty* (Dublin: Townhouse, 2004)
 - ‘Glory Be to the World’, review of Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. by Peter Fallon (2004), *Irish Times*, 23 Oct 2004, p. 10
 - ‘Strangeness and Beauty’, review of Patrick Kavanagh, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Antoinette Quinn (2004), *Guardian*, 1 January 2005
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jan/01/poetry>> [accessed 11 June 2018]
 - *District and Circle* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006)
 - *District and Circle* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)
 - ‘One Poet in Search of a Title’, *Times*, 25 March 2006, section 4, p. 7
 - ‘A Special Evening with Seamus Heaney and Peter Fallon’, online video recording, YouTube, 6 May 2010 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dom-3DJzVs0>> [accessed 12 July 2018]
 - ‘In a Field’, in *1914: Poetry Remembers*, ed. by Carol Ann Duffy (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 94
 - ‘Suffering and Decision’, in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Mark Wormald, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 221-37
- Hughes, Ted, Edward James Hughes Papers, London, British Library, Add MS 88918
- ‘The Rock’, *Listener*, 1779 (19 September 1963), 421-23
 - *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967; repr. 2008)
 - and Seamus Heaney, eds. *The Rattle Bag* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982)
 - ‘Taw and Torridge’, in *West Country Fly Fishing*, 1983 [B121], The Ted Hughes Papers, Atlanta, Georgia, Emory University Stuart A. Rose Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Library, Mss. 644, series 2, subseries 2.4d, box 115, ff. 1, MS and TS
 - *A Choice of Shakespeare’s Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991)
 - *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992)
 - *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, ed. by William Scammell (London: Faber and Faber 1993)

- ‘The Hart of the Mystery’, *Guardian*, 5 July 1997, p. 21
- ‘So Quickly It’s Over’, *Wild Steelhead & Salmon* (Winter 1999), 49-58
- *Collected Poems*, ed. by Paul Keegan (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)
- *Letters of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Christopher Reid (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)
- ‘Hoof-trimming’, *Spectator*, 19 February 2015
<http://www.spectator.co.uk/2015/09/hoof-trimming/> [accessed 18 July 2016].
- ‘February 17th’, *Poetry Archive* <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/february-17th>
 [accessed June 13, 2016]
- Oswald, Alice, *The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996;
 repr. London: Faber and Faber, 2007)
- ‘The Universe in Time of Rain Makes the World Alive with Noise’, in *A Green Thought in a Green Shade: Poetry in the Garden*, ed. by Sarah Maguire (London: The Poetry Society, 2000), pp. 35-48
- *Dart* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002)
- ‘*The Thing in the Gap-Stone Stile*’, and ‘*Dart*’, in *Don’t Ask Me What I Mean: Poets in their Own Words*, ed. by Clare Brown and Don Paterson (Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2003), pp. 207-09, 208-09.
- ‘Alice Oswald Creates a River Dart Community Poem for the Millennium’, *The Poetry Society*, <http://www.poetrysoc.com/content/archives/places/dart/> [accessed 28 February 2017].
- ed. *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)
- ‘Wild Things’, *Guardian*, 3 December 2005
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/dec/03/poetry.tedhughes/> [accessed 28 November 2016]
- *Woods etc.* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)
- ed. *Sir Thomas Wyatt: Poems Selected by Alice Oswald* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008)
- and Jessica Greenman, *Weeds and Wildflowers* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)
- *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011)
- ‘*Memorial*’, *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 231 (Winter 2011), p. 14
- ‘The Unbearable Brightness of Speaking’, *New Statesman*, 17 October 2011
[available at, http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2011/10/homer-essay-iliad-poetry-poem](http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2011/10/homer-essay-iliad-poetry-poem) [accessed 5 May 2017]

- ‘Inside Ian Hamilton Finlay’s Enchanting Garden Little Sparta’, *Harper’s Bazaar*, November 2013 <<http://www.harpersbazaar.co.uk/culture/culture-news/news/a34436/inside-ian-hamilton-finlays-enchanting-garden-little-sparta/>> [accessed 17 January 2017]
- *Falling Awake* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016)
- and Kevin Mount, *The Letter Press* <<http://www.theletterpress.org>> [accessed 23 June 2018]

Secondary

- Abrioux, Yves, *Ian Hamilton Finlay: A Visual Primer*, 2nd edn (London: Reaktion Books, 1992)
- Addison, Joseph, ‘An Essay on the Georgics’, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker and others, 20 vols (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1956-2002), V: *Poems: The Works of Virgil in English 1697*, ed. by Alan Roper and Vinton A. Dearing (1987), pp. 145-53
- ‘No. 411, Saturday, June 21, 1712 [Addison on the Pleasures of the Imagination]’, in *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*, ed. by Eric Mackie (Boston; New York: Bedford/St, Martins, 1998), pp. 387-89
- Allen, Michael, ‘Provincialism and Recent Irish Poetry: The Importance of Patrick Kavanagh’, *Two Decades of Irish Writing: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Douglas Dunn (Cheadle Hulme: Carcanet, 1975), pp. 23-36
- ‘The Parish and the Dream: Heaney and America’, *Southern Review*, 31.3 (Summer 1995), 726-38
- Allison, Jonathan, ‘Patrick Kavanagh and the Antipastoral’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 42-58
- Alpers, Paul, ‘Modern Eclogues’, *TriQuarterly*, 116 (2003), 20-47
- *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996)
- Anon., ‘About the Archive’, *Beaford Archive* <<http://www.beaford-arts.org.uk/archive/page.php?id=1>> [accessed June 17, 2016]
- ‘The View Presents Seamus Heaney’, *The View Presents*, RTÉ One, 18 April 2006
- Arkins, Brian, and Patrick F. Sheeran, ‘Coloniser and Colonised: The Myth of Hercules and Antaeus in Seamus Heaney’s *North*’, *Classical and Modern Literature*, 10.2 (1990), 127-34
- Armitage, Simon, *Still* (London: Enitharmon, 2016)

- Auden, W. H., *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1991)
- ed. *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 6 vols (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996-2015) I: *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse, 1926-1938* (1996)
- *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 6 vols (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996-2015) II: *1939-1948* (2002)
- *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 6 vols (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996-2015), III: *1949-1955* (2008)
- ‘September 1, 1939’, *Selected Poems* ed. by Edward Mandelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), pp. 86-89
- Auge, Andre J., “‘A Boyant Migrant Line’: Seamus Heaney’s Deterritorialized Poetics’, *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 14 (2003), 269-88
- Bachelard, Gaston, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. by Kenneth Haltman (Paris: The Dallas Institute, 2002)
- Bahri, Deepika, *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)
- Baker, Robert, “‘All voices should be read as the river’s mutterings’: The Poetry of Alice Oswald’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 46.2 (2017), 99-118
- Bann, Stephen, *A Description of Stonypath* (Bradford: Friends of Stonypath Garden, 1981)
- Barrell, John, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)
- Barrell, John, and John Bull, eds., *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse* (London: Allen Lane, 1974)
- Barringer, Tim, *Men at Work: Art and Labour in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005)
- Bauer, Mark, “‘It was still all me.’ Self-Forgetful Autobiography in Seamus Heaney’s *Death of a Naturalist*’, *Textual Practice* (2016), 1-19
- Bayley, John, ‘Facts and Making’, a review of Ted Hughes, *Moortown* (1979), Thom Gunn, *Selected Poems 1955-1975* (1980), and W. S. Graham, *Collected Poems 1942-1977* (1980), *London Review of Books* 2.3 (21 February 1980), 14-15
- Berry, Wendell, ‘The Use of Energy’, in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002), pp. 279-92

- *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, ed. by Paul Kingsnorth (London: Allen Lane, 2017)
- Bate, Jonathan, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2015)
- Benson, William, *Virgil's Husbandry, Or an Essay on Virgil's Georgics: Being the Second Book Translated into English Verse. To which are added the Latin Text and Mr. Dryden's Version. With Notes Critical, and Rustick* (London: William and John Innys, 1724)
- Bentley, Paul, *Ted Hughes, Class and Violence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)
- *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion and Beyond* (Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998)
- Berger, John, 'Why Look at Animals?', *About Looking* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 1-28
- Bevis, Matthew, 'Introduction: At Work with Victorian Poetry', *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-13
- Blake, William, 'Auguries of Innocence', *Blake: The Complete Poems*, ed. by W. H. Stevenson, 3rd edn (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2007), pp. 612-15
- Blyth, Ian, 'A Sort of English Georgics: Vita Sackville-West's *The Land*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45.1 (2009), 19-31
- Boland, Eavan, 'Afterword', Alice Oswald, *Memorial: A Version of Homer's Iliad* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2012), pp. 83-90
- 'An Irish Georgic', *A Woman Without a Country* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), pp. 48-49
- 'Anna Liffey', *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp. 199-205
- *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995)
- 'Outside History,' *American Poetry Review*, 19.2 (March/April 1990), 32-38
- Borodale, Sean, *Bee Journal* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2012)
- Bowness, Sophie, *Barbara Hepworth: The Sculptor in the Studio* (London: Tate, 2017)
- Bradley, Anthony, 'Pastoral in Modern Irish Poetry', *Concerning Poetry*, 14.2 (1981), 79-96
- Bristow, Tom, 'Bioregional Biography and the Geography of Affect: Spatialised Somnambulance in Alice Oswald's *Sleepwalk on the Severn*', *AJE: Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, 4 (2014/2015), 1-21

- “‘Contracted to an eye-quiet world’: Sonic Census or Poetics of Place in Alice Oswald”, *Symbiosis*, 10.2 (October 2006), 167-85
- *The Anthropocene Lyric: An Affective Geography of Poetry, Person, Place* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
- Brown, Bill, *The Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003)
- ‘Thing Theory’, in *Things*, ed. by Bill Brown (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 1-22
- Brownlow, Timothy, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983)
- Bunting, Madeline, ‘Alice Oswald on the Devonshire Landscape: “There’s a terror in beauty”’, *Guardian*, 13 July 2012, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jul/13/alice-oswald-devonshire-landscape>> [accessed 13 Jan 2017].
- Burris, Sidney, *The Poetry of Resistance: Seamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990)
- Burrow, Colin, ‘Virgil in Translation’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. by Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 21-37
- Burt, Stephanie, ‘A Bit Like Gulliver’, review of Dennis O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (2008), and *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, edited by Bernard O’Donoghue (2009), *London Review of Books*, 31.11 (11 June 2009), 19-23
- Carville, Conor, “‘Heaney and the Neighbour’: Poetry Between Politics and Ethics”, *Textual Practice*, 28.4 (2014), 517-92
- Chatwin, Bruce, *The Songlines* (London: Vintage, 1998)
- Chalker, John, *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969)
- Clare, Aingeal, ‘Outcanoevre’, review of Alice Oswald, *Woods etc.* (2005), *London Review of Books*, 28.6 (23 March 2006), 27-30
- Clare, John, ‘The Nightingale’s Nest’, *The Poems of the Middle Period 1822-1837*, ed. by Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996-2003), III, *The Midsummer Cushion* (1998), pp. 456-60
- Clark, Indy, *Thomas Hardy’s Pastoral: An Unkindly May* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
- Clark, Thomas A., ‘Eclogue’, *Thomas A. Clark*, <<http://thomasaclarkblog.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/eclogue.html>> [accessed 15 May 2018]

- Clarke, Gillian, ‘‘A Difficult Birth, Easter 1998’’, *Four Fields* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998), p. 17
- Coetzee, J. M., *The Lives of Animals*, ed. by, Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999)
- Cole, Teju, ‘All the Names: Alice Oswald’s *Memorial*’, *Brick*, 90 (Winter 2013), 13-16
- Collini, Stefan, ‘The Literary Critic and the Village Labourer: “Culture” in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Prothero Lecture’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 14 (2004), 93-116
- Collins, Floyd, *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity* (Newark, N.J.: University of Delaware Press, 2003)
- Congleton, J. E., and T. V. F. Brogan, ‘Georgic’, in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 461-62
- Conlogue, William, *Working the Garden: American Writers and the Industrialization of Agriculture* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001)
- Corcoran, Neil, *Poetry and Responsibility* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014)
- *Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)
- Cox, Fiona, ‘Interview with Alice Oswald’, *Practitioners’ Voices in Classical Reception Studies* (2013) <<http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/2013/oswald>> [accessed 28 November 2016]
- Cunningham, Valentine, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)
- ‘MacNeice and Thirties (Classical) Pastoralism’, in *Incorrigibly Plural: Louis MacNeice and his Legacy*, ed. by Fran Brearton and Edna Longley (Manchester: Carcanet, 2012), pp. 85-100
- Curtis, Tony, ed., *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, 4th edn (Bridgend: Seren, 2001)
- Cuthbertson, Guy, and Lucy Newlyn, eds. *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2007)
- Davie, Donald, ‘Poet: Patriot: Interpreter’, *Critical Inquiry*, 9.1, The Politics of Interpretation (September 1982), 27-43
- Davis, Wes, ‘From Mossbawn to Meliboeus: Seamus Heaney’s Ambivalent Pastoralism’, *Southwest Review*, 92.1 (2007), 100-15
- Deakin, Roger, ‘Foreword’, *The River’s Voice: An Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Angela King and Susan Clifford (Totnes: Green Books, 2000), pp. 15-18
- Dee, Tim, ‘Introduction’, *Ground Work: Writing on Places and People*, ed. by Tim Dee (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), pp. 1-14

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014)
- Douglas, Keith, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Ted Hughes (London: Faber and Faber, 1964)
- Duffy, Caron Ann, *The Bees* (London: Picador, 2011)
- Eagleton, Terry, 'Hasped and Hooped and Hirpling', a review of *Beowulf*, trans. by Seamus Heaney (1999), *London Review of Books*, 21.22 (11 November 1999), 15-16
- Eliot, T. S., 'Studies in Contemporary Criticism', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Roger Schuchard and others, 8 vols (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014—), I: *Apprentice Years, 1905-1918*, ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker and Roger Schuchard (2014), pp. 760-63
- 'Virgil and the Christian World', in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), pp. 121-31.
- Ely, Steve, *Ted Hughes's South Yorkshire: Made in Mexborough* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Richard Poirier (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- Empson, William, *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (1935) (New York: New Directions, 1974)
- Esterhammer, Angela, *Romanticism and Improvisation, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- 'Spontaneity, Immediacy, and Improvisation in Romantic Poetry', in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Charles Mahoney (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 321-36
- Faas, Ekbert, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1980)
- Faggen, Robert, 'Frost and the Questions of Pastoral', in *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. by Robert Faggen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 49-74
- Fairer, David, 'Georgic', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 457-72
- 'Persistence, Adaptations and Transformations in Pastoral and Georgic Poetry', in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 259-86
- 'The Pastoral-Georgic Tradition', in *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. by Andrew Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 111-18

- “‘Where Fuming Trees Refresh the Thirsty Air’: The World of Eco-Georgic’, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 40 (2011), 201-18
- Fallon, Peter, ‘Afterwords’, *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by Peter Fallon (Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 2004), pp. 120-27
- Farjeon, Eleanor, *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958)
- Farley, Paul, and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into Britain’s True Wilderness* (London: Vintage, 2012)
- Farrier, David, “‘Like a Stone’: Ecology, *Enargeia*, and Ethical Time in Alice Oswald’s *Memorial*”, *Environmental Humanities*, 4 (2014), 1-18
- Fenollosa, Ernest, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. by Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1936)
- Fowler, Alastair, ‘Georgic and Pastoral: Laws of Genre in the Seventeenth Century’, in *Culture and Cultivation in Early Modern England: Writing and the Land*, ed. by Michael Leslie and Timothy Raylor (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), pp. 81-88
- *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to Theories of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982; repr. 2002)
- ‘The Beginnings of English Georgic’, in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 105-25
- Finlay, Ian Hamilton, *A Model of Order: Selected Letters on Poetry and Making*, ed. by Thomas A. Clark (Glasgow: Wax366, 2009)
- *Selections*, ed. by Alec Finlay (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2012)
- Frawley, Oona, *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Dublin; Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2005)
- ‘Kavanagh and the Irish Pastoral Tradition’, in *Patrick Kavanagh*, ed. by Stan Smith (Dublin; Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. 72-92
- Frost, Robert, *Letters of Robert Frost*, ed. by Donald Sheeby and others, 5 vols (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014—), II, *1920-1928*, ed. by Donald Sheeby, Mark Richardson, Robert Bernard Hass, and Henry Atmore (2016)
- *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. by Edward Connery Lathem (London: Vintage, 2001)
- Fuller, John, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)
- Fuller, Roy, ‘Views’, *Listener*, 85 (11 March 1971), 297

- Gale, Matthew, and Chris Stevens, *Barbara Hepworth: Works in the Tate Collection and Barbara Hepworth Museum St Ives* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999, repr. 2001)
- Garland, John of, *Parisiana Poetria*, trans. by Traugott Lawler (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974)
- Garrard, Greg, *Ecocriticism*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004),
- Gelpi, Albert, *Living in Time: The Poetry of C. Day Lewis* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Genovese, Michael, 'An Organic Commerce: Sociable Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Georgic', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 46.2 (Winter 2013), 197–221
- Gifford, Terry, 'Dead Farms, Dead Leaves': Culture as Nature in *Remains of Elmet* and *Elmet*', in *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 39-47
- 'Interview with Fay Godwin', *Thumbscrew* 18 (Spring 2001), 114-17
<<http://www.terrygifford.co.uk/Fay%20Godwin%20interview.pdf>> [accessed 3 January 2017]
- *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry*, 2nd edn (Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2011)
- *Pastoral* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 1999; repr. 2010)
- *Ted Hughes* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009)
- ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- 'The Environmental Humanities and the Pastoral Tradition', in *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, ed. by Christopher Schliephake (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexicon Books, 2017), pp. 159-74
- Gifford, Terry, and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981)
- Godwin, Fay, 'Ted Hughes and *Elmet*,' in *The Epic Poise: A Celebration of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Nick Gammage (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 106-07
- Goldsworthy, Andy, *Hand to Earth: Sculpture 1976-1990* (1990), ed. by Terry Friedman and Andy Goldsworthy (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006)
- Goodman, Kevis, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Goodridge, John, 'Introduction', in John Dyer, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by John Goodridge (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2000), pp. xi-xxii

- *John Clare and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- *Rural Life in Eighteenth Century Rural Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- Graver, Bruce, 'Wordsworth's Georgic Beginnings', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 33.2 (1991), 137-59
- 'Wordsworth's Georgic Pastoral: *Otium* and *Labor* in "Michael"', *European Romantic Review*, 1.2 (1991), 119-34
- Griffiths, Eric, 'Blasted With Ecstasy', a review of Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992), *Times*, 09 April 1992, p. 5
- Groom, Nick, "'Let's discuss over country supper soon': Rural Realities and Rustic Representations", *The Clearing* (22 August 2013) <<https://www.littletoller.co.uk/the-clearing/lets-discuss-over-country-supper-soon-rebekah-brooks-and-david-cameron-rural-realities-and-rustic-representations-nick-groom/>> [accessed 13 July 2018]
- Hadley, Edward, *The Elegies of Ted Hughes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
- Haffenden, John, *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981)
- *William Empson: Among the Mandarins* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)
- Hahnemann, Carolin, 'Book of Paper, Book of Stone: An Exploration of Alice Oswald's *Memorial*', *Arion*, 22.1 (Spring/Summer 2014), 1-31
- Hair, Ross, *Avant-Folk: Small Press Poetry Networks from 1950 to the Present* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 171-200
- Halperlin, David M., *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1983)
- Hardy, Thomas, *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by P. N. Furbank (London: Macmillan, 1967)
- Harrison, Gary, 'John Clare's Agrarian Idyll: A Confluence of Pastoral and Georgic', in *A History British Working-Class Literature*, ed. by John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 195-207
- Harrison, Robert Pogue, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008)
- Harrop, Stephe, 'Speech, Silence and Epic Performance: Alice Oswald's *Memorial*', *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies*, 8 (2013), 79-91
- Hart, Henry, 'Seamus Heaney: Circling Back', review of Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (2006), Daniel Tobin, *Passage to the Centre: Imagination and the Sacred in*

- the Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (1999) and Floyd Collins, *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity* (2003), *The Sewanee Review*, 114.3 (Summer 2006), 456-62
- *Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992)
- Haughton, Hugh, 'First and Last Things', *Irish Review*, 49-50 (Winter-Spring 2014/2015), 194-07
- 'Twenty for the Eighties', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 January 1983, 78
- 'Water Worlds', *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 May 2013, 13-15
- Haughton, Hugh, Adam Phillips, and Geoffrey Summerfield, *John Clare in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962)
- *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001)
- Heiny, Stephen, 'Virgil in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain*: "Images and Symbols Adequate to Our Predicament"', *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, 65.4 (2013), 304-19
- Heinzelman, Kurt, 'Roman Georgic in the Georgian Age: A Theory of Romantic Genre', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 33.2 (Summer 1991), 182-14
- Henderson, John, *The Roman Book of Gardening* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Herschberg, Stuart, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes* (Dublin: Wolfhound press, 1981)
- Heuston, Sean, *Modern Poetry and Ethnography: Yeats, Frost, Warren, Heaney and the Poet as Anthropologist* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)
- Hill, Geoffrey, *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- 'Unhappy Circumstances', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 176-91
- Hiltner, Ken, *What Else is Pastoral?: Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (Ithaca, NY.; London: Cornell University Press, 2011)
- Hong, Chen, *Bestiality, Animality, and Humanity* (Wuhan: Central China Normal University Press, 2005)
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley, *Selected Poetry*, ed. by Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Housman, A. E., *The Poems of A. E. Housman*, ed. by Archie Burnett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)

- Howarth, Peter, *British Poetry in the Age of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- “‘Water’s Soliloquy’: Soundscape and Environment in Alice Oswald’s *Dart*”, in *Poetry & Geography: Place and Space in Post-War Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 190-203
- Hubbard, Thomas K., *The Pipes of Pan: Intertextuality and Literary Filiation in the Pastoral Tradition from Theocritus to Milton* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001)
- Huey, Michael, ‘An Interview with Seamus Heaney’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 January 1980, 16-17
- Hughes, Carol, Letter to Jack Thacker, 16 May 2016
- Letter to Jack Thacker, 17 February 2017
- Hughes, Gerald, *Ted and I* (London: The Robson Press, 2012)
- Hynes, Samuel, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London; Sydney; Toronto: The Bodley Head, 1976)
- Impens, Florence, *Classical Presences in Irish Poetry After 1960: The Answering Voice* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)
- “‘Help me please my hedge-school master’: Virgilian Presences in the Work of Seamus Heaney”, *Irish University Review*, 47.2 (2017), 251-65
- Ingold, Tim, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000; repr. 2011)
- Innes, Sue, ‘Man of Sparta’, in *Wood Notes Wild: Essays on the Poetry and Art of Ian Hamilton Finlay*, ed. by Alec Finlay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995), pp. 9-15
- Jaffa, Naomi, and Alice Oswald, ‘A Conversation with Alice Oswald’, *Brick*, 90 (Winter 2013), 17-20
- James Ravilious: A World in Photographs*, dir. by Anson Hartford (Banyak Films, 2006)
- James, Stephen, *Shades of Authority: The Poetry of Lowell, Hill and Heaney* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007)
- ‘The Nature of Hill’s Recent Poetry’, in *The Salt Companion to Geoffrey Hill*, ed. by Andrew Roberts (Cambridge: Salt, forthcoming) < https://research-information.bristol.ac.uk/files/47928644/James_Nature_of_Hill_s_Recent_Poetry.pdf > [accessed 13 July 2018]
- Johnson, Samuel, ‘Cowley’, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), I, pp. 191-234

- Johnstone, Keith, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979)
- Jordan, John, review of *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, ed. by Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion (1982), *Irish Press*, 1 August 1983, p. 9
- Jungnickel, M., *Goebbels* (Leipzig: R. Kittler, 1933)
- Kalof, Linda, *Looking at Animals in Human History* (London: Reaktion, 2007)
- Kavanagh, Patrick, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Antoinette Quinn (London: Allen Lane, 2004)
- ‘The Parish and the Universe’, in *Collected Pruse* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), pp. 281-82
- Keegan, Bridget, ‘Georgic Transformations and Stephen Duck’s “The Thresher’s Labour”’, *SEL* 41.3 (Summer 2001), 545-62
- Keith, W. J., *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975)
- Kellaway, Kate, ‘Into the woods’, *Observer*, 19 June 2005
 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/-jun/19/poetry.features?INTCMP=SRCH>>
 [accessed 12 June 2012]
- Kennedy, Sarah, *T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)
- Kennedy-Andrews, Elmer, ‘Seamus Heaney and the Americans’, *Symbiosis*, 16.1 (2012), 3-20
- Kermode, Frank, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1975; repr, 1983)
- Kerridge, Eric, *The Agricultural Revolution* (1967) (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005)
- Kerridge, Richard, ‘Ecocritical Readings’, in *New Casebooks: Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 176-90
- Kerrigan, John, ‘Ulster Ovids’, in *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland*, ed. by Neil Corcoran (Bridgend: Seren, 1992), pp. 237-69
- Kirsch, Adam, ‘Seamus Heaney: Digging with the Pen’, *Harvard Magazine*, November-December 2006 <<https://harvardmagazine.com/node/2623>> [accessed 19 April 2018]
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1980, repr. 2003)
- Landry, Donna, *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671-1831* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001)

- Larkin, Philip, 'Under a Common Flag', *Observer*, 14 November 1982, 28
- Lehman, Aaron, *Accidental Modernism: Spontaneity and Design in Modern American Poetry* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Rochester, 2010)
- Lewis, C. Day, *The Buried Day* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960)
- Lidström, Susanna, *Nature, Environment and Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Poetics of Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015)
- Little, Katherine C., *Transforming Work: Early Modern Pastoral and Late Medieval Poetry* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013)
- Lloyd, David, "'Pap for the Dispossessed": Seamus Heaney and the Politics of Identity', in *Seamus Heaney*, ed. by Michael Allen, Macmillan Casebook Series (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 155-84
- Logan, William, 'Ply the Pen', review of Seamus Heaney, *Human Chain* (2010), *New York Times*, 24 September 2010, section BR, 18.
- Long, Richard, 'Five, six, pick up sticks | Seven, eight, lay them straight', in *Selected Statements & Interviews*, ed. by Ben Tufnell (London: Haunch of Venison, 2007), pp. 15-21
- *Walking in Circles* (New York: George Braziller, 1991)
- Longley, Edna, *Louis MacNeice: A Study* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988)
- *Poetry and Posterity* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2000)
- *Under the Same Moon: Edward Thomas and the English Lyric* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2017)
- 'War Pastorals', in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 461-82
- *Yeats and Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)
- Longley, Edna, ed. *Edward Thomas: The Annotated Collected Poems* (Tarsset: Bloodaxe Books, 2008)
- Low, Anthony, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985)
- Lycett-Green, Candida, 'Foreword', Peter Beacham, *Down the Deep Lanes* (Devon: Devon Books, 2000), p. 9
- MacCaig, Norman, *The Poems of Norman MacCaig*, ed. by Ewen MacCaig (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2005)
- Macdiamid, Hugh, *Collected Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, prepared by John C. Weston (New York: The Macmillan Company; London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1967)

- MacDiarmid, Lucy, *Auden's Apologies for Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990)
- Macfarlane, Robert, 'A Counter-Desecration Phrasebook', in *Towards Re-Enchantment: Place and Its Meanings*, ed. by Gareth Evans and Di Robson (London: Artevents, 2010), pp. 107-30
- 'Gravity and Grace in Geoffrey Hill', *Essays in Criticism*, 58.3 (2008), 237-56
- *Landmarks* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015)
- MacKenzie, Garry, 'Poetry, Ecocriticism and Labour: The Work of Writing and Reading', *Green Letters*, 20.2 (2016), 183-96.
- MacNeice, Louis, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Peter McDonald (London: Faber and Faber, 2016)
- 'The Elusive Classics', in *Selected Literary Criticism of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by Alex Heuser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 124-77
- Major, William H., *Grounded Vision: New Agrarianism and the Academy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011)
- Malay, Michael, 'Ted Hughes: Another Look at the Jaguar', *Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 4.1 (2014), 89-100
- Mannon, Ethan, 'Georgic Environmentalism in *North of Boston*: An Ethic for Economic Landscapes', *ISLE*, 23.2 (Spring 2016), 344-69
- Marchetti, Paola, 'Auden's Landscapes', in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 200-11
- Martin, Richard P., 'Similes and Performance', in *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text*, ed. by Egbert Bakker and Ahuvia Kahane (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 138-66
- Martindale, Kym, 'She Do the River in Different Voices: Lyric Democracies in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', in *Process: Landscape and Text*, ed. by Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 309-28
- Marx, Leo, *The Pilot and the Passenger: Essays on Literature, Technology, and Culture in the United States* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Mendelson, Edward, *Later Auden* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000)
- Menos, Hilary, 'UK364195', *Red Devon* (Bridgend: Seren, 2013)
- McAuliffe, John, '"Epic"', Patrick Kavanagh', *Irish University Review*, 39.2, Poems that Matter 1950-2000 (Autumn/Winter 2009), 195-201
- McCarthy, Jeffrey Mathes, *Green Modernism: Nature and the English Novel, 1900-1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

- McDonald, Peter, “‘My Eyes Turned Down on the Past’: MacNeice’s Classicism”, in *Louis MacNeice and his Influence*, ed. by Kathleen Devine and Alan J. Peacock (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1998), pp. 34-52
- McElroy, James, ‘Ecocriticism & Irish Poetry: A Preliminary Outline’, *Estudios Irlandeses*, 6 (2011), 54-69
- Mercer, Lucy, ‘Back to the Crisis of Living: Time and Trauma in Alice Oswald’, *Wild Court*, 17 October 2016 <<http://wildcourt.co.uk/features/657/>> [accessed 25 April 2018]
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964)
- Middleton, Rowan, ‘Connection, Disconnection and the Self in Alice Oswald’s *Dart*’, *Green Letters*, 19.2 (2015), 157-69
- Minchin, Elizabeth, “‘Translation’ and Transformation: Alice Oswald’s Excavation of the *Iliad*”, *Classical Receptions Journal*, 7.2 (2015), 202-22
- Morpurgo, Michael, *All Around the Year* (London: John Murray, 1979)
- Morrison, Blake, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Methuen, 1982)
- Morton, Timothy, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA.; London: Harvard University Press, 2007)
- Motion, Andrew, ‘The Poem and the Path’, *Hudson Review*, 62.1 (Spring 2010), 19-54
- Moulin, Joanny, *Ted Hughes: New Selected Poems 1957-1994* (Paris: Didier-Érudition, 1999)
- Muellner, Leonard, ‘The Simile of the Cranes and Pygmies: A Study of Homeric Metaphor’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 93 (1990), 59-101
- Murphy, Richard, ‘Last Exit to Nature’, a review of Ted Hughes, *New Selected Poems* (1982), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), *Cave Birds* (1975), *Under the North Star* (1981), and *Moortown* (1979), *New York Review of Books*, 29.10 (10 June 1982) <<http://0-www.nybooks.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/articles/1982/06/10/last-exit-to-nature/>> [accessed 11 July 2018]
- Nemerov, Alexander, ‘The Flight of Form: Auden, Brueghel, and the Turn to Abstraction in the 1940s’, *Critical Inquiry*, 31.4 (Summer 2005) 780-810
- Nott, Michael, ‘Ted Hughes’s and Fay Godwin’s *Elmet*: The Remains of Photography’, *Word & Image*, 32.3 (2016), 267-73
- Nicholson, Max, *The Environmental Revolution: A Guide for the New Masters of the World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970)

- Nicholson, Norman, 'Wall', *Collected Poems*, ed. by Neil Curry (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 321-22
- Nickels, Joel, *The Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)
- Niles Hooker, Edward, and others, eds., *The Works of John Dryden*, 20 vols (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1956-2002), V: *Poems: The Works of Virgil in English 1697*, eds. Alan Roper and Vinton A. Dearing (1987)
- Norris, Christopher, and David B. Wilson, 'An Interview with William Empson', in *Some Versions of Empson*, ed. by Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007)
- Norris, Leslie, and Charles E. Wadsworth, 'The Beautiful Young Devon Shorthorn Bull, Sexton Hyades XXXIII', in Leslie Norris, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Meic Stephens (Bridgend: Seren, 2008), p. 218
- O'Brien, Karen, 'Imperial Georgic, 1660-1789', in *The Country and the City Revisited: England and the Politics of Culture, 1550-1850*, ed. by Gerald Maclean, Donna Landry, and Joseph P. Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 160-79
- O'Donoghue, Bernard, *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- O'Driscoll, Dennis, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008)
- O'Grady, Thomas B., "'At a Potato Digging': Seamus Heaney's Great Hunger", *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 16:1 (July 1990), 48-58
- 'Poetics and Polemics: The Politics of Patrick Kavanagh's "Spraying the Potatoes"', *Colby Quarterly*, 31.4 (December 1995), 242-52
- Overton, Mark, *The Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- Owens, C  il  n, 'Joint Turbary: Heaney's "Digging" and Eoghan Rua    S  illeabh  in's "A S  amais, d  an dom"', *Irish Studies South*, 1.1 (2014), 50-59
- Padilla, Juan R  ez, 'Seamus Heaney's Elemental Ecopoetics: Earth, Water, Air and Fire', *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 1.2 (2009), 21-30
- Pag  n, Victoria Emma, 'The Afterlife of Little Sparta', in *'Disciples of Flora': Gardens in History and Culture*, ed. by Victoria Emma Pag  n, Judith W. Page, and Brigitte Weltman-Aron (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015), pp. 145-65
- Parham, John, "'Two Ply": Discordant Nature and English Landscape in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 64 (April 2012), 111-29
- Parker, Michael, "'Back in the heartland": Seamus Heaney's "Route 110" Sequence in *Human Chain*', *Irish Studies Review*, 21.4 (2013), 374-86

- ‘Fallout from the Thunder: Poetry and Politics in Seamus Heaney’s *District and Circle*’, *Irish Studies Review*, 16.4 (November 2008), 369-84
- “‘His nibs’”: Self Reflexivity and the Significance of Translation in Seamus Heaney’s *Human Chain*’, *Irish University Review*, 42.2 (2012), 327-50
- Patterson, Annabel, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)
- ‘Wordsworth’s Georgic: Genre and Structure in *The Excursion*’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 9 (1979), 145-54
- Pellicer, Juan Christian, ‘The Georgic’, in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 403-16
- Perry, Seamus, ‘Hughes’s Urbanity’, paper delivered at *Ted Hughes: Dreams as Deep as England* conference, University of Sheffield, 11 September 2015
- ‘The Shoreham Gang’, review of Rachel Campbell-Johnston, *Mysterious Wisdom: The Life and Work of Samuel Palmer* (2011), *London Review of Books*, 34.7 (5 April 2012), 30-33
- Phillips, Janet, ‘A Leaf Out of her Book: Alice Oswald’, *The Poetry Society*, <<http://archive.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/publications/poetrynews/pn2005/asprofil>> [accessed 25 April 2018]
- Pinard, Mary, ‘Voice(s) of the Poet-Gardener: Alice Oswald and the Poetry of Acoustic Encounter’, *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*, 10.2 (2009), 17-32
- Poirier, Richard, *Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)
- Porter, Max, ‘Interview with Alice Oswald’, *White Review*, August 2014 <<http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-alice-oswald/>> [accessed 28 November 2016].
- Potts, Donna L., *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition* (Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 2011)
- Pound, Ezra, ‘Modern Georgics’, *Poetry*, 3.3 (December 1914), 127-30
- ‘Canto XVI’, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1970, repr. 1996), pp. 68-72
- Prynne, J. H., *Field Notes: ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and Others* (Cambridge: J. H. Prynne, 2007)
- Punter, David, *Metaphor* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007)
- Putnam, Michael C. J., ‘Virgil and Heaney: Route 110’, *Arion*, 19.3 (2012), 79-108

- Raine, Craig, *Haydn and the Valve Trumpet* (London: Picador, 1990)
- Rainer, Emig, 'Lust in the Ground: The Erotics and Politics of the Soil in Contemporary Poetry', *Critical Survey*, 14.2 (May 1 2002), 13-50
- Reader, John, *The Untold History of the Potato* (London: Vintage: 2009)
- Reddick, Yvonne, 'Henry Williamson and Ted Hughes: Politics, Nationhood, and Nature Writing', *English*, 62.239 (2013), 353-74
- "“Ichthyologue”: Freshwater Biology in the Poetry of Ted Hughes', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 22.2 (Spring 2015), 264-83
- *Ted Hughes: Environmentalist and Ecopoet* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)
- *The Genius of the Stream: Ted Hughes and Fluvial Influence* (doctoral dissertation, University of Warwick, 2012)
- 'Throttle College?': Ted Hughes's Cambridge Poetry', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 44.3 (1 September 2015), 213-32
- Rees, Roger, ed., *Ted Hughes and the Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Reeves, Gareth, *T. S. Eliot: A Virgilian Poet* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989)
- Richtarik, Marilyn J., *Acting Between the Lines: The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics, 1980-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- Ricks, Christopher, and Jim McCue, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 2 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), I: *Collected and Uncollected Poems*
- Roberts, Neil, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)
- Robinson, Craig, 'The Good Shepherd: Moortown Elegies', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 257-84
- Robinson, Peter, *Poetry, Poets, Readers: Making Things Happen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002)
- Rosenbaum, Susan B., *Professing Sincerity: Modern Lyric Poetry, Commercial Culture, and the Crisis in Reading* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007)
- Ruskin, John, 'Of the Pathetic Fallacy', *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), V, pp. 204-20
- Russell, Richard Rankin, 'Loss and Recovery in Peter Fallon's Pastoral Elegies', *Colby Quarterly*, 37.4 (December 2001), 343-56

- *Poetry and Peace: Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, and Northern Ireland* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010)
- *Seamus Heaney's Regions* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014)
- Sackville-West, Vita, *The Garden* (London: Michael Joseph, 1946)
- Sagar, Keith, ed. *Poet and Critic: The Letters of Ted Hughes and Keith Sagar* (London: The British Library, 2012)
- Sayre, Laura B., 'Locating the Georgic: From the Ferme Ornée to the Model Farm', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 22.3 (2002), 167-92
- Schafer, R. Murray, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Vermont: Rochester Books, 1994)
- Schuchard, Roger, "'Into the Heartland of the Ordinary": Seamus Heaney, Thomas Hardy, and the Divided Traditions of Modern and Contemporary Poetry', *Éire-Ireland*, 49.3-4 (Fall/Winter 2014), 270-300
- 'T. S. Eliot and Ted Hughes: Shamanic Possession', *South Atlantic Review*, 76.3 (Summer 2011), 51-73
- Scijag, Leonard M., 'Ted Hughes and Ecology: A Biocentric Vision', in *The Challenge of Ted Hughes*, ed. Keith Sagar, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp 160-81
- Sergeant, David, 'Moortown/Moortown Diary', *The Ted Hughes Society* <<http://thetedhughessociety.org/moortown>> [accessed 11 April 2016]
- Shakespeare, William, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. by M. M. Mahood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- Shapcott, Jo, 'Six Bee Poems', *The Poetry Society*, 2011 <<http://poetrysociety.org.uk/poems/six-bee-poems/>> [accessed 15 June 2015]
- Sharpe, Tony, ed., *W. H. Auden in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Sheeler, Jessie, *Little Sparta: A Guide to the Garden of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2015)
- Shenstone, William, 'Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening', ed. by Stephen Bending and Andrew McRae, <<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/~sdb2/unconnected.htm>> [accessed 18 Jan 2017]
- Shiach, Morag, *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989)

- Shoard, Marion, 'Edgelands', in *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain*, ed. by Jennifer Jenkins (London: Profile Books, 2002), pp. 117-46
- Skea, Ann, 'Ted Hughes: "The Critical Forum" Series, Norwich Tapes Ltd. 1978.', transcript by Ann Skea, *Ann.Skea.com*, <<http://ann.skea.com/CriticalForum.htm>> [accessed 13 June 2016]
- 'Variant Editions: *Cave Birds, River, Remains of Elmet* and *Three Books*', *Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 2.1 (2011), 17-19
- Skoie, Mathilde, and Sonia Bjørnstad Velázquez, *Pastoral and The Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006)
- Smith, Ben, 'Singing at the Right Pace: The Songlines of Alice Oswald and Thomas A. Clark', *PN Review*, 205 (June 2012), 50-52
- Smith, Jos, 'Common Ground: Insurgence, Imagination and Intangible Cultural Heritage', in *The Routledge Companion to Intangible Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Michelle L. Stefano and Peter Davis (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 300-13
- Smith, Stan, "'Literally, for this": Metonymies of National Identity in Edward Thomas, Yeats and Auden', in *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*, ed. by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 113-34
- Solnick, Sam, *Poetry and the Anthropocene: Ecology, Biology, and Technology in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017)
- Stevens, Chris, 'Modernism Out of Doors: Barbara Hepworth's Garden', in *Sculpture and the Garden*, ed. by Patrick Eyres and Fiona Russell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 145-55
- Stewart, Alan, and others, eds. *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, 16 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996—) IV: *The Advancement of Learning*, ed. by Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000)
- Stopa-Hunt, Chloe, 'Visible Vanishing', review of Alice Oswald, *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* (2011), *Oxonian Review*, 18.5 (12 March 2012) <<http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/visible-vanishing/> [accessed 6 May 2017]
- Sweet, Timothy, *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in American Literature, 1580-1864* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)
- Taplin, Oliver, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of The Iliad* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)
- Thacker, Jack, 'The Thing in the Gap-Stone Style: Alice Oswald's Acoustic Arrangements', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 44.2 (June 2015), 103-18
- Thomas, Edward, *The Collected Poems and War Diary, 1917*, ed. by Peter Sacks (London: Faber and Faber, 2004)

- Thomas, R. S., 'The Garden', *Collected Poems, 1945-1990* (London: Phoenix, 1995, repr. 1998), p. 132
- Thomas, Richard F., *Lands and Peoples in Roman Poetry: The Ethnographical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1982)
- 'The *Georgics* of Resistance: From Virgil to Heaney', *Vergilius*, 47 (2001), 117-47
- 'The Old Man at Tarentum Revisited: Memory, Reference and Genre in Virg., Georg. 4, 116-48', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, 29 (1992), 35-70
- *Virgil and the Augustan Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)
- Twiddy, Iain, *Pastoral Elegy in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)
- Tyler, Meg, *A Singing Contest: Conventions of Sound in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005)
- Velten, Hannah, *Cow* (London: Reaktion, 2007)
- Vendler, Helen, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Harper Collins, 1998)
- Virgil, *Georgics*, ed. by Richard F. Thomas, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- *Georgics*, trans. by Christina Chew (Indianapolis IN.: Hackett, 2002)
- *Georgics*, trans. by Peter Fallon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- *Georgics*, trans. by Janet Lembke (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005)
- *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by C. Day Lewis (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940)
- *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. by R. D. Blackmore (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1871)
- *Virgil's Georgics: A Poem of the Land*, trans. by Kimberly Johnson (London: Penguin, 2009)
- Walder, Dennis, *Ted Hughes* (Milton Keynes; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1987)
- Wallace, Anne D., 'Farming on Foot: Tracking Georgic in Clare and Wordsworth', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 34 (1992), 509-40
- Ward, Sam, "'To list the song & not to start the thrush": John Clare's Acoustic Ecologies', *John Clare Society Journal*, 29 (2010), 19-32
- Wasley, Andrew, Fiona Harvey, Madlen Davies, and David Child, 'The UK has nearly 800 livestock mega farms, investigation reveals', *Guardian*, 17 July 2017,

- <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/17/uk-has-nearly-800-livestock-mega-farms-investigation-reveals>> [accessed 17 July 2017]
- Weil, Simone, 'The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force', *Chicago Review*, 18.2 (1965), 5-30
- Wells, Robert, *Collected Poems and Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2009)
- West, Thomas, *Ted Hughes* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1985)
- Wheatley, David, "'The bilingual race / And truth of that water": Seamus Heaney and the Irish Language', *Journal of European Studies*, 46.1 (2016), 10-23
- "'This is Proteus, whoever that is'", review of Alice Oswald, *Dart* (2002), *Guardian*, 13 July 2002
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jul/13/featuresreviews.guardianreview13>> [accessed 26 February 2017]
- Whicher, George F., 'Sage from Boston', in *Mornings at 8.50: Brief Evocations of the Past for a College Audience* (Norwood, MA.: The Hampshire Bookshop for Amherst College, 1950), pp. 34-39
- Wilkinson, L. P., *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Survey* (Cambridge; London; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1969)
- Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976)
- *The Country and the City* (1973) (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985)
- Wilmer, Clive, 'Edward Thomas: Englishness and Modernity', *PN Review*, 27.4 (March-April 2001), 59-64
- Wilson-Okamura, David Scott, *Virgil in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- Winterson, Jeanette, 'Against the Flow', review of Alice Oswald, *Dart* (1996), *Times*, 3 August 2002, 15 <<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/journalism/alice-oswald/>> [accessed 25 May 2017]
- Woodham-Smith, Cecil, *The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845-49* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962)
- Wordsworth, William, 'Preface', *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. by James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 741-60
- Wormald, Mark, 'Irishwards: Ted Hughes, Freedom and Flow', *Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 6.2 (2017), 58-77
- Wormald, Mark, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford, eds., *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

Ziolkowski, Theodore, *Virgil and the Moderns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993)